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FOREWORD

These papers were read in the winter of 1949 at the University of Denver as the first group of Lectures in Literature. It seemed appropriate that this first group be concerned with the writers who speak most directly to us. In their different ways the men discussed indicate the creative developments, the social attitudes, and the ideas that have conditioned our society. They are both products and mirrors of the age, and their analysis must constitute an analysis of much of our thought.

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A.M.I.F.

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The Paradoxes of Marcel Proust

BARRISS MILLS

Like all great works of art, Marcel Proust's huge novel, *Remembrance of Things Past,* is the subject of varied and even contradictory interpretations. The same is true of Shakespeare, of Pope, of Whitman, of Goethe and Dante, and in our own day of Joyce and T. S. Eliot. Major works of art are by definition complex and inclusive; they are usually turning points in philosophy and outlook as well as technique and style. Usually they represent the culmination of an older tradition and at the same time the beginning of a new one.

Major works of art are bridges from one era to another; they are reflections of the complex and changing life of their times; and they are the externalized expression of rich and subtle personalities. All really great and influential artists might say of themselves, as Whitman said, "I am large. I contain multitudes."

By such a definition, Proust is one of our greatest artists and his work a masterpiece of literary art. So it is not surprising that criticism of Proust has been varied and contradictory.

To take the matter of tradition alone, Proust's novel may be viewed as a culmination of the tradition of Balzac, a monumental

social comedy, or it may be viewed as a documentary picture of the breakdown of that society. Proust's detailed and loving picture of French polite society, from the Fauberg St. Germain, dominated by the Guermantes, to the bourgeois salon of Mme. Verdurin and her "little clan," justifies the critics who see Proust as a kind of fictional *Almanach de Gotha* or Burke's *Peerage;* while his no less thorough account of the breakdown of that society after the Dreyfus Case and World War I and the blurring of distinctions between aristocracy, bourgeoisie, and proletariat justifies those critics who prefer to see in Proust an elegant Marxian recorder of the decadence and dissolution of feudal and capitalist society.

Again, the huge novel, with its autobiographical technique and introspective point of view, may be seen as carrying to its logical conclusion (unfriendly critics might even say to a *reductio ad absurdam*) the tradition of intimate and sensitive self-revelation stemming from Rousseau's *Confessions;* while a critic with another perspective might discover in its spinning out of introspection to new and unforeseen conclusions a major step in the objectivation and universalization of personal analysis which has been carried further by Freud and Joyce. The novel is large enough to contain both Rousseauistic sensibility and Freudian objectivity. Certainly the endless, leisurely disentangling of the narrator's feelings and emotions toward his mother in *Swann's Way,* or the careful tracing through dozens of pages in *The Captive* of his jealous love of Albertine, and even the frank admissions of personal selfishness, callousness, and amorality are ultimate extensions of the introspective novel, but Proust's hypothesizing of "rules" or patterns of love and jealousy, his postulation of a kind of law of supply and demand for sexual desire lead us in the direction of psychoanalysis.

Still another major paradox which leads to contradictory interpretations comes from Proust's central concern with questions of time, of permanence and change, of universals and the flux. His "privileged moments," as when he tastes the famous *madeleine* dipped in tea, give him a sense of timelessness, of immortality in the moment suggestive of Emerson or Plato, while his constant concern with the flux itself, the changes wrought not

only by time but by perspective, has inspired comparisons with Bergson and Einstein.

We shall return to some of these paradoxes later for further examination and possible resolution. It is enough for the moment to show that Proust, like the other major writers I have mentioned, escapes ready classification or labeling in terms of influences, schools, or philosophies. Like life itself, which he attempts to reflect, he refuses to be reduced to easy formulas. Again and again in the study of Proust we shall encounter paradoxes, apparent contradictions, ambivalences, and ambiguities which make criticism of Proust as exciting as it is difficult.

If we turn to Proust's life, we are confronted at once with a whole new set of paradoxes. In the first place, we can scarcely find out the truth about Proust the man. It is dangerous, as Proust himself warns, to identify the "I" of *Remembrance of Things Past* with the author of it. Sometimes there are undoubted parallels between the experience of the narrator in the novel and Proust's own life. But at other times the "I" of the novel is apparently tailored to fit the dramatic necessities of the novel—becomes a fictional rather than a realistic "I." Yet again there are moments when we feel that the "I" of the novel is neither the real Proust nor a fictional character created by the exigencies of the novel itself, but rather a rationalized or romanticized picture of Proust as he would have liked himself to be. For instance, one may wonder whether Proust could have been made so easily and completely at home among the "Guermantes," even with his charm and the undoubted appeal of his physical weakness to the sympathies and condescension of these self-assured aristocrats. Then too, Proust has been elaborately accused of disguising his own homosexuality in the Albertine episodes—Albertine is supposed, according to this theory, to be a sexual metamorphosis of Proust's male chauffeur, Emile Agostinelli—and of rationalizing it in his apologetic treatment of the subject and his attributing homosexual tendencies to so many of his characters.

Even when, by careful checking and cross-checking, and by reference to Proust's *Letters* and the memoirs of his acquaintances, we have pieced together a fairly reliable account of his

life, we are still faced with the almost irreconcilable paradox of a neurotic semi-invalid producing one of the most ambitious and sustained pieces of fiction of our time. At first blush, Proust's life, like that of Edgar Allen Poe, appears to add conviction to the popular paradox that literary "geniuses" are usually maladjusted to the ordinary exigencies of life. On the other hand, Proust's letters seem to show a growing self-assurance and a confidence in his literary mission which almost force us to revise our view of him as a rather pathetic misfit in the society of his time.

I

The factual data concerning the man Proust are rather meagre. They are of interest chiefly as they throw light on his writings. Proust was born in Paris in July, 1871, soon after the violent suppression of the Paris Commune. In a sense he was born amid the echoes of that revolutionary failure which foreshadowed the more gradual upheaval of the status quo which he himself records in the novel. His mother was Jewish, affectionate, perhaps oversolicitous of young Marcel's pleasure and health. His father was a doctor, university professor, and minor government official. Himself robust and energetic, the father did not understand the son, alternating between a mild contempt for his sickliness and momentary bursts of bewildered kindness. Marcel became almost completely his mother's boy.

Marcel's half-Jewish inheritance was to have a marked effect on his writing and his life. Full status in the society of the Fauberg St. Germain was apparently denied him because of his Jewishness. And in the Dreyfus controversy he lost many of his noble friends because of his outspoken Dreyfusard position. His paternal inheritance, on the other hand, seems to have prevented his complete self-identification with that cause, and he maintained a somewhat paradoxical position in defending both Dreyfus and the Catholic Church (which the Dreyfusards were attacking) at one and the same time.

In his tenth year Proust suffered an almost fatal attack of asthma, which frightened him and his parents, broke down the last vestiges of parental discipline, and left him a permanent

neurotic and semi-invalid. A period of slow recuperation was followed by frequent relapses and semi-confinement to a cork-lined room, where he slept most of the day (when his insomnia allowed him to sleep at all) and from which he went out mostly after dark, in a closed limousine, wrapped in furs the year round.

During intermittent periods of relatively good health, Proust was able to attend school, where he was thought by his schoolmates to be somewhat spoiled and insincere. Already he had developed a rather obsequious manner and a way of complimenting and flattering others for which his companions invented a word, "to Proustify."

At 18 Proust was well enough to put in his year of military service. And during all this time he began the assiduous life in society which was to give him the materials for his study of the Guermantes and Verdurins. Though regarded by some as a social climber, he was apparently looked upon by leading society women as somehow outside the battle, and whether because of his flattering manner or the sympathy created by his weak health, he was widely and even eagerly received. He moved from the bourgeois literary and artistic salons through those of the Napoleonic aristocracy to those of the old Bourbon nobility. Yet he asserted that he was searching, not for status in society, but for its poetic essence, its literary possibilities.

The death of Dr. Proust in 1903 did not upset Marcel greatly, but the death of his mother two years later seemed like the end of the world to him. In a sense it may have been the beginning of his independence and artistic life, but at the moment Proust wrote, "My life . . . has lost its only purpose, its only sweetness, its only love, its only consolation."

Meanwhile, Proust, though he had determined long before on a career as a writer, had produced little to convince anyone that he was more than a dilletante of letters. He wrote reviews, critical articles, and short stories for a little magazine organized by friends and for a few other journals, and these were collected in 1896 into a book, *Les Plaisirs et les Jours.* The publication of this little book must have confirmed suspicions that he was a literary trifler. It was a thin, expensive, privately printed octave volume with pale green covers, luxurious paper, and illustrations

by the most popular flower painter of the day. Proust even arranged to have four of the poems set to music and sung with accompaniment at one of the soirées.

The result of all this was that Proust gained the reputation of being a typical fin-de-siécle decadent rather than a serious artist. Much later, André Gide, who, among several editors, had turned down *Swann's Way,* the first volume of the seven-decker novel, was to attribute his critical blindness to this impression of elegant trifling. In writing Proust to apologize and to beg the opportunity of publishing the subsequent volumes, he said: "For me you were still the man who frequented the houses of Mmes. X and Z, the man who wrote for the *Figaro.* I thought of you, shall I confess it . . . as a snob, a man of the world, and a dilletante."

As we look back now at the stories and sketches in *Pleasures and Regrets,* we can see many of the characteristics which were to blossom into greatness later, but we can scarcely blame Proust's contemporaries for failing to project them into the future of possibilities. And Proust himself seems, in his excitement over mere mention in a review and his scheming to have his book noticed in the journals, to have had a scarcely higher opinion of himself.

But he had begun serious work of a sort. In 1899 he rediscovered Ruskin, and for several years thereafter worked diligently at translations of Ruskin's works as well as critical articles on his views of art and architecture. Eventually this palled and there followed a period of uninspired work on a novel which he had long contemplated. The work went badly until suddenly, in 1909, a moment of inspiration supplied him with both the theme of *Remembrance of Things Past* and the determination to go to work on it in earnest.

In the last volume of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu,* the "I" of the novel, who is in part Proust himself, tells us of a curious incident which occurs as he is about to enter the house of the Prince and Princess of Guermantes for his final view of French society. As a certain unevenness of the pavement causes him to place one foot lower than the other, a sudden rush of intense feeling and happiness comes over him.

Searching for the cause of this unique and profound joy, he

realizes that the uneven flagstones remind him involuntarily of Venice and the uneven pavements of the baptistry of St. Mark's. When the narrator has passed into the house of the Guermantes and is waiting to be received, he experiences in quick succession three similar "privileged moments" touched off by the sound of a plate being struck by a spoon, the texture of a starched napkin as it touches his lips, and the gurgle of a hot water pipe. In each instance the past comes back to him more vividly through the "involuntary" memory than it had ever come through deliberate recall. From these experiences and similar ones in the novel the narrator concludes that reality is not what it appears to be, that chronological time is less real than the "privileged moments" when life escapes time to take on new color and warmth, and that the tying of past to present through both chronological and psychological time is to be the central theme of his novel.

From all this we may safely infer that some similar intuitive vision occurred to Proust in 1909 and caused him to begin his writing in earnest. At any rate, he retired almost completely from society, discontinued much of his correspondence, and shut himself up to work on the novel. At this point, it may be noted, Proust turned to his own profit the illness and neuroticism which had always plagued him. He turned away visitors by saying he was too ill to receive them. He left letters unanswered and regretted invitations for the same reason. Apparently his friends, judging by past experience, refused to take his new literary diligence seriously, but the tradition of his strange hours and delicate health was so well established he could use it to put them off diplomatically.

As he worked, the project grew in scope from one volume to two or three. Originally all were to be published under a single title, but when the first was privately published in 1913 it bore a separate subtitle, *"Du Côté de Chez Swann."* The other two volumes were to appear in quick succession.

Then came the war; publication of the other volumes was postponed, and Proust went on rewriting and expanding the novel until by his death in 1922 the total project had more than doubled in size. He was still adding and revising when, after

giving some final touches to the death scene of the novelist, Bergotte, he died in November of 1922.

II

The question of time is central to *Remembrance of Things Past.* In a letter to Prince Bibesco in 1912, Proust says:

> There are novelists . . . who envisage a brief plot with few characters. This is not my conception of the novel. There is a plane geometry and a geometry of space. And so for me the novel is not only plane psychology but psychology in space and time. That invisible substance, time, I try to isolate. But in order to do this it was essential that the experience be continuous . . .

In the same letter he goes on to describe his projected work as "a sequence of novels of the unconscious," from which the involuntary memory brings back to us a sense of the past more vividly than can the memory at the surface of consciousness.

> I believe that it is involuntary memories practically altogether that the artist should call upon for the primary subject matter of his work. First, because they are involuntary, because they take shape of their own accord, inspired by the resemblance to an identical minute, they alone have the stamp of authenticity. Then they bring things back to us in an exact proportion of memory and forgetting. And finally, as they make us savor the same sensation under wholly different circumstances, they free it from all context, they give us the extratemporal essence.

The involuntary memory, then, working through the unconscious, escapes the limitations of chronological time to bring past and present together in a mystical union. Altogether in the novel the narrator experiences at least nine of these "privileged moments," thereby breaking up the pattern of conventional chronology.

To be sure, the progress of conventional time is not ignored in the novel. Characters grow old, society changes, individuals die or disappear from the scene. And at the Guermantes' party immediately following the incident of the paving stones, the conventional passage of time is dramatically contrasted to the newly discovered "oneness in time" of past and present in the unconscious. As the narrator joins the group inside, he supposes for a

moment that he has come upon a masquerade in which all the guests have put on white wigs and beards, and masks and manners of old age. He realizes soon that time, which has relentlessly kept moving while he has been away from society, has changed the people he had known so well almost beyond recognition. And he learns from the comments of those around him that he too has grown old.

But generally speaking conventional time does not greatly interest Proust in the novel. Dates seem to have been deliberately omitted. Incidents can be dated only by certain public events such as the various turns of the Dreyfus Affair or World War I, or by deaths, marriages, and internal priorities of action. In some passages, like the "Overture" of *Swann's Way,* time is deliberately blurred to simulate the achronological state of the half-wakened mind. The memories of the narrator, whether voluntary or unconscious, range freely into past and future events, still further confusing the time sequence. And at the end of the novel we are back at the beginning, in a sense, since the narrator has only now discovered the principle which will enable him to begin the writing of his novel from the beginning.

In Proust's treatment of time there is a dualism which is the key to all or nearly all of the apparent contradictions in his work. This is the Platonic or Emersonian dualism of the One and the Many, Unity and Variety, the Permanent and the Changing. Proust confessed great admiration for Emerson, and he seems to have acquired from Emerson, as well as from Bergson and Plato, a strong sense of the contrast between the "flux," or superficial reality of life, and the eternal or unchanging—the mystic higher reality of universal law. Like Emerson, he valued both as necessary to human intellect, but he cherished the flux mainly as the materials out of which intellect, intuition, and emotion wove patterns of universal law.

Proust was well aware of the tradition of positivistic naturalism into which he had been born. Compte, Taine, Darwin, Zola he did not care to ignore, even had it been possible, and his account of the flux as he saw it and lived it is colored by the naturalistic determinism of his day. Will has almost no place in his scheme of things—the "I" of the novel is wholly a prey to his

sensibilities and his desires, as is Baron Charlus, the homosexual, and as are all of the other characters. Indeed, Proust's stressing of the theme of sexual inversion, and his urbanely amoral account of heterosexual love have earned him the label of decadence along with Baudelaire and Huysmans. His mystic sense of the absolute did not, then, prevent his treating the reality of the flux in relativistic terms.

Yet out of all the rich and seemingly aimless variety of the passing show, Proust felt, as Emerson had felt, must be abstracted laws, universals, even absolutes more true and more rewarding than the stuff from which they were shaped. As early as 1888 he had written to a friend, "Reality is always changing and of little significance," and again in 1901 he wrote to Prince Bibesco, "This is the apparent life . . . The real life is underneath all this." Facts in themselves are of little value, he wrote in 1913; "I omit every detail, every fact . . . I include only what seems to me to reveal some universal law." He answered the criticism of his first novel—that he had reported everything—by the retort: "I report nothing . . . not once does a character of mine close a window, wash his hands, put on an overcoat, or go through the forms of an introduction." Accused of looking at life through a microscope, he thought it more accurate to say he used a telescope, pointed at time.

Many of the apparent contradictions in Proust are resolved by the Proustian dualism. It explains the paradox of Proust's attitude toward the senses—that they are tricky, deceitful, easily jaded, easily perverted, easily degraded into decadence, neuroticism, disgust; but that they remain the sole key to the unconscious, the involuntary memory, the privileged moments in which eternity is perceived. Similarly, the life of man in time is all illusion, Proust would say, with Eugene O'Neill; only by cherishing our illusions can the ordinary life have meaning and motive; when we become completely disillusioned, life is not worth living. But when we grasp the reality of universals, illusion is stripped from us like scales from a blind man's eyes, and life is for the first time truly beautiful. Thus Proust, in unfolding the many sided life of his novel, can see through all illusions—Swann's jealousy of Odette, Charlus's perverted desire for Morel, the

narrator's love for Albertine, Saint-Loup's glorification of the prostitute Rachel—because he has grasped the universal law of human love and has no longer any need for illusions.

This duality explains also the paradox of Proust's apparent "coldness" toward persons and movements. Desmond McCarthy has pointed to the Albertine episodes in the novel as evidence that Proust lacked capacity for real love or sympathy or warmth in human relations. Others have cited Proust's indifference to World War I, to the class conflicts of his day, even the lack of fervor of his Dreyfusism as evidence of a coldness or egocentricity which detracts from his effectiveness as a writer or person. Emerson, by the way, constantly met with similar accusations, perhaps for the same reasons. But if the flux is illusory, then Marcel is not in love with Albertine but with an illusory concept of Albertine within himself. Only as a general law may be derived from Marcel's feelings about Albertine, and the feelings of many Marcels about many Albertines, do these feelings become important or, indeed, possess significant reality. Only the *laws* of Dreyfusism (or anti-Dreyfusism) are significant; only the *laws* of human behavior during wartime have significant meaning.

Other transvaluations follow almost by necessity. Proust has stated that "It is in ourselves that we discover the seemingly external." Instead of the realistic or naturalistic technique of objectivity, then, Proust uses introspection, meditation, contemplation. Instead of making case histories of characters, Proust finds in himself the insight into characters like Swann and Charlus. By a similar introspective insight he can understand both M. Vinteuil, the shy old man whom nobody can believe while he lives is really the composer of certain musical works of genius, and Vinteuil's daughter, who combines gentleness of manner with sadistic cruelty toward her father because of her Lesbianism. Bergotte, the novelist, Elstir, the painter, M. Legrandin, the snob, Dr. Cottard, the pedant, Bloch, the vulgarian, Berma, the fading star of the theater, and Rachel, her upstart rival, and a host of minor characters, take their vitality from Proust's inner sense of the unconscious reality. Depth provides breadth and scope—it is no mere substitute for them.

By another transvaluation, "major" events become "minor,"

and vice versa. "Action," in the usual sense, is relatively unimportant in the novel. The way the Duc de Germantes persuades himself that a cousin is not really dying and that the Duc need not stay away from a cherished ball becomes more important than whether the cousin dies. The moment when Marcel, bending down to untie his shoe, suddenly realizes that his grandmother has been dead for months and will never come to help him untie his shoes again, becomes more important than the death of the grandmother. The ways Françoise, the faithful family servant, or the Duchesse de Germantes use the French language reveal their characters. The way Saint-Loup wears his monocle, or the way Mme. Verdurin registers amusement, are "major" items in Proust's scheme of values.

In traditional terms, *Remembrance of Things Past* almost completely lacks drama. There is no plot to speak of, there are no conflicts among characters to create suspense and denouement. After reading for two hours in *Swann's Way* we find Marcel still in bed. Yet if real drama is inner rather than external tension and conflict, Proust's novel is almost "pure" drama. The moment when the narrator waits as a child for his mother to come up the stairs, hoping that she will break the family "rule" by giving him a second good-night kiss, but knowing that such a concession would destroy the valiant efforts of his mother not to spoil him and encourage his neuroticism, is more dramatic in this inner sense than, say, Hamlet's stabbing of Polonius behind the arras. Equally dramatic, and even less melodramatic, is the narrator's progressive realization, extending over seven long novels, that the glamor he had thought inherent in the name Guermantes lay not in nobility itself, nor the society of the Fauberg St. Germain, nor in any of the individual Germantes, but in his own ignorance, his own illusions. Indeed, Proust's skill in building up inner tension to a climax over hundreds of pages is one of his unique characteristics.

There is one traditional dramatic device, peripety, or reversal, which Proust uses constantly in developing his characters. By deliberate system, his important characters appear to us first in a false light—our first impressions must be reversed by what we learn from their subsequent appearances.

In a sense, of course, the whole novel is a reversal. Marcel's realization at the end that the reality he has seemed to be living and observing—the conscious reality—is not the important one, is the central philosophical reversal of the book. Proust's own life, too, is a reversal, an almost religious conversion from aimless dilletantism to monastic devotion to literature. And within the novel, the deliberate multiplication of reversals is the most striking structural aspect.

Marcel, who is not only the "I" but the "eyes" of the novel, remains a relatively stable character throughout. The other characters, almost without exception, undergo constant change, emphasizing the instability of the "flux." Or, to be more accurate, Marcel's conception of them undergoes endless change.

There is Charles Swann, who appears early in the book as a bourgeois friend of Marcel's bourgeois parents. They are at first unaware, and cannot believe when it is revealed to them, that Swann moves in the most exalted circles of society, is considered an expert in matters of art, and is the only peer of the Duchess of Guermantes in intellect and "wit." (It appears later, by the way, in another reversal, that the Duchess's "wit" is composed merely of derogatory comments on others and a mechanical formula for saying and doing the opposite of what is expected.) Still later, Swann, who had been too much the gentleman even to mention his close acquaintance with royalty, boasts interminably about the fact that his wife, Odette, is visited by society women of the upper bourgeoisie and the more tarnished noble families. Still later, during *l'affaire Dreyfus,* Swann abandons all concern for society matters and alienates most of his former society acquaintances by voicing his Dreyfusard opinions on every occasion.

An even more striking illustration is the Baron de Charlus, who takes the center of the stage in *Cities of the Plain,* the fourth volume of the novel. He first appears at Combray, in the company of Odette, Swann's wife, and Marcel overhears his parents remarking it is common knowledge he is Odette's lover. Later Saint-Loup tells Marcel this could not be, though Charlus is a great "womanizer." When Marcel first meets Charlus face to face, Charlus glares at him in an apparently unfriendly fashion.

Charlus inveighs at length against the lack of manliness in the younger generation, and makes Marcel ashamed of his own physical weakness. Next time they meet, Charlus offers to make Marcel his protege, but takes offense at something Marcel says and becomes again unfriendly. Finally it develops that Charlus is a Sodomite who could not have had any interest in Odette but was very definitely interested in Marcel. A further reversal in Charlus takes place. When he first appears he is the most stiff-necked of aristocrats, ordering Duchesses to exclude the "upstart" Napoleonic nobility from social affairs to which they invite him. Then, in order to remain close to Morel, of whom he is terribly jealous, he begins to frequent the bourgeois Verdurins' salon, though he continues to carry everything with a high hand. Still later, the Verdurins deliberately snub him and exclude him from "the little clan," and he is so far fallen from his high place that he can think of no retort. Finally we see him, a broken and pitiful old man, still driven downward by his perversion, frequenting a lowclass bawdy house and submitting to the worst possible humiliations from its inmates.

Albertine, Marcel's mistress, appears first as a fresh, virginal country girl seen on the beach at Balbec. Later Marcel learns, by degrees of revelation, that she is already promiscuous not only with men but with other women.

The greatest reversal of the novel is, perhaps, in Marcel's conception of the magic name, Guermantes. For Marcel as a youth, the name Guermantes has epitomized all that is ancient, rich, strange, and noble in French society. He falls in love with the Duchess of Guermantes mainly because of her name. By degrees, throughout the long novel, the layers of glamor are stripped away, until in the end the name has lost all meaning.

By this device of reversals Proust recreates the sense of variety and change within the flux. But within the flux are elements and qualities which illustrate the unchanging essences, the patterns and identities which escape time, according to Proust's vision.

Marcel, for example, loves first Gilberte Swann, then the Duchess de Guermantes, then Albertine. But all these loves are alike in many ways; as long as the woman loved is unattainable, indifferent, unloving in return, Marcel's yearning for them

dominates his whole being. And even after familiarity has begun to breed a kind of contempt, all the old longing can be revived in a moment by an occasion for jealousy, a suspicion that some other person is loved more than Marcel. And this "law" of love extends to all the other love affairs described in the novel—Charles Swann's love of Odette, Saint-Loup's love of Rachel, even Charlus's love of Morel.

Furthermore, each character has his own peculiar patterns of behavior which never really vary, which govern his conduct in the most dissimilar situations. Baron Charlus, for instance, is dominated by his homosexuality and his enormous pride. It is the unchanging and unchangeable combination of these two qualities that brings about his downfall. If he could overcome his inversion, he could continue to stare down all the rest of society from his sense of superior worth. Or if he could have humbled himself to compromise with his perversion, he might have steered a successful course of duplicity. It is just because he cannot bend that he is broken almost completely in the end; it is because he will not stoop that he is at last forced to grovel.

III

Proust's idealism differs radically from Plato's or Emerson's because it discovers the true reality *beneath* apparent reality, in the subconscious, not *above* it in a supernatural intelligence or Oversoul. And the secrets one discovers there are aesthetic secrets, not moralistic or ethical ones. The salvation of man from illusion, and of reality from time comes from art alone. Art alone can fix the transcience of life and give it permanent reality. And the salvation lies not in rules of conduct or ethical motivations but in the motivation and realization of the keener perception of reality itself. Even in his aestheticism, Proust is closer to Pater than to Ruskin. He is closest of all, perhaps, to Oriental theories of art.

As life passes us by, it is lost to us forever, or would be lost forever were it not possible, by involuntary memory, by searching the unconscious, to rescue a part of it from oblivion. But it is a process infinitely subtle and difficult. The mere reporter

cannot, by noting events as they occur, catch the meanings of what he sees. The mere historian, public or private, however diligently he racks his conscious memory or consults the records, cannot recall and set down the past as it really was. Even the naturalistic or traditionalistic artist or novelist cannot by broadening his canvas or constructing his plots recreate the inner reality of experience.

Only the artist who has caught the secret of the involuntary memory, who has learned to dredge the unconscious wherein reality is never lost, can hope to succeed in this difficult task of reconstruction. And even he must walk gently, as Proust says, in "drawing a reality out of the unconscious in such a way as to make it enter into the realm of the intellect, while trying to preserve its life, not to garble it, to subject it to the least possible shrinkage."

Conventional forms and techniques of art will not do, traditional valuations of human experience will not do for this essential work of art. The traditional valuations are symbolized by M. de Norpois, the diplomat, who thinks in terms of protocol, treaties, forms of diplomacy. For him the art of concrete, specific reality and symbolism is "a pastime for the dilletante," and the patterns of lasting truth which Marcel hopes to extract from them are needlessly subtle. M. de Norpois has his pat formulas to cover every contingency, to pigeon-hole every new facet of human life. He does not even suspect the existence of "that reality from which we live so far removed and from which we become more and more separated as the formal knowledge we substitute for it grows in thickness and imperviousness."

Bloch, on the other hand, apparently represents the realistic or naturalistic school which, to avoid the traditionalistic formulas, contents itself with presenting the raw material of life without finding in it any "meanings" at all. This approach is as barren as the traditionalistic one.

This is the final paradox, the paradox of art, whereby it is fatal to follow the traditionalists in imposing conventional patterns on reality and almost equally fatal to follow the realists and naturalists in letting the superficial realisms stand by themselves, disparate, unrelated and unassimilated by the imagina-

tion. Only a new form and technique and valuation can succeed, according to Proust, in making that advance upon tradition which, though it arouse indignation and misunderstanding at the time, will justify its being called classic when properly appreciated.

These are what I have chosen to call the paradoxes of Marcel Proust. I have suggested that Proust resolved them to his own satisfaction by means of his concepts of psychological time, the reality of the unconscious, a mystic dualism of illusion and essence, and the salvation of art. I have no intention of passing judgment on the ultimate validity of these concepts. I shall only say, finally, that for me Proust has succeeded, by all pragmatic tests, in creating in his novel a strange, new, wonderful exploration of immediate life and ultimate reality, and that the seeming contradictions, the ambiguities and ambivalences, the paradoxes have contributed to its brimming vitality.

Federico García Lorca

FEDERICO DE ONÍS

It is a source of gratification to me to be one of the contributors to the series "Writers of Our Years," as is the choice of the writer on whom I have been asked to speak. But I should like to make clear at the outset that, although I consider Federico García Lorca one of the great poets of our time, I do not think him the only Spanish poet who could have been included among the great contemporary writers in this series. Unamuno is a figure of world renown, as is Ortega y Gasset, and to a lesser degree Benavente, Baroja and Valle-Inclán, whose works are available in English. Among the poets—whose work always suffers from translation into another language—no one familiar with Spanish would hesitate to concede the highest rank to Juan Ramon Jiménez and Antonio Machado. And it would also be necessary to bear in mind writers of Spanish America, such as Ricardo Güiraldes, Gabriela Mistrel, Alfonso Reyes, Pablo Neruda, and other novelists, essayists and poets, who are beginning to assume their place in world literature.

Federico García Lorca enjoys a reputation in the world today hardly equalled by any other poet of our epoch by reason of

the significance of his tragic death in the Spanish Civil War, that prelude to the conflagration of armies and ideas which it ushered in and which still continues. To the majority of people throughout the world, who stumble over the pronunciation of his name, Federico García Lorca has come to symbolize the innumerable victims of Fascism, enemy, by its very nature, of human intelligence and personality. Even though it is true that Lorca was one of its victims, and his death was the more shocking not only because of his exceptional artistic gifts, but because his lack of political significance made the crime so wanton, there is an injustice and an error in losing sight of the countless other victims, among whom were other men of letters of Spain, Antonio Machado, for example, the great poet of the preceding generation, and one of Lorca's poetic mentors. The death of Antonio Machado, on the French frontier, as he left Spain in the Republican exodus, after having, consciously and by choice, stood shoulder to shoulder with his people all through the civil war, could be considered a more adequate symbol of the tragedy. And from another point of view, so is the death of Unamuno in Salamanca, agonizing alone, like the fierce individualist he was, between the two Spains in conflict within his own soul, as in all sad, spacious Spain. The true glory of Federico García Lorca was his dying anonymously, one more of the 25,000 estimated to have died in his Granada in the same way, dragged from their houses, crowded into trucks, and shot by the roadside. Who has kept the roll of those who died in this fashion in all the villages and cities of Spain? Lorca, without choosing it, followed his Spanish destiny of dying at the right moment when to do so meant to be Spanish. In this turn of fate his glory was born; through his death his whole life and his art took on full universal meaning, because the fact is, as we shall see, that beneath the apparent light-heartedness of this consummate artist there pulsated, with a strength unequalled in any other writer of his day, a deep, unerring sense of all that is Spanish and of death as its final avatar.

He had been born thirty-seven years before in a rural town in the *vega* of Granada, Fuentevaqueros, and there the deep, definitive roots of his personality and his work are to be found.

Granada is Andalusia, the last Moorish Spain; it is, at the same time, Castile, the final expansion of Castile, Queen Isabel's Castile. For this reason Lorca, who is so Andalusian is also so Spanish, and Castile to him represented the essence of Spain. "During my absences from Spain," he said, "when I am separated from it by land or sea, my homesickness is crystallized not around my Granada, not around its spreading olive groves, but around a meaning-fraught morning at the foot of the meaning-fraught walls of Avila. Spain, from a distance, is Castile." His feeling toward Castile was not contradictory to, but identical with his basic love for his native Andalusia, from which it originated, just as was his feeling for the other regions of Spain, of Spanish America, and the world. The widely current concept of Lorca's Andalusianism in a local and conventional sense, and, even more, that of his "gipsyishness," which has led many to believe him a "legitimate gipsy," as he calls those of his Gipsy Ballads, must, therefore, be rectified. There is a certain admixture of gipsy blood and spirit in Granada, and it would be impossible to rule out the possibility that anyone from Granada might have gipsy blood. What everyone does have is an undeniable influence of the manners, gestures, songs, dances, way of speaking, and psychology of the gipsies, although to a large extent these are vestiges of archaic Spanish rather than gipsy traditions. Lorca came of a good, middle-class family; on his father's side, they were landowners, deeply attached to the land, and on his mother's, who was a schoolteacher before her marriage, gentle-folk, with a tradition of culture in all its aspects. For this reason, from infancy Lorca received in his home the impulse toward study, literature, and music, while at the same time he lived in intimate association with the servants and tenant farmers and others of the folk class. This background of his childhood was always a living force in Lorca and found full and original expression in all his literary work. Always, wherever he was, one of the essential notes of his personality was a child-like quality touched with genius that charmed all who knew him. He had what in Spanish is known as *simpatia.*

At the University of Granada, and later in Madrid, he studied humanities and law, but he never followed these careers pro-

fessionally. From early youth he revealed his indubitable artistic vocation; although his accomplished work was in the field of literature, he also cultivated music, painting, the theatre, and the cinema. He had received a good musical training from childhood; he was familiar with both classical and modern music, and he was on terms of close friendship with Manuel de Falla, whose interest he shared in both folk and cultivated music. They collaborated in the work of reviving interest in "deep song," the highest form of Andalusian traditional music. For his own pleasure and that of his friends, Lorca's interest became more and more centered on folk songs, which he sang, accompanying himself on the piano, improvising harmonizations which he never wrote down, with an art so alive, spontaneous and natural that they could be grasped by all who had the privilege of hearing him. He sang the songs of Granada, which he had learned as a child, and others which, with his unerring instinct, he had selected from the collections brought together by folklorists. In this way he contributed, by chance, one might say, to launching a number of folk songs, previously unknown, which are now sung in all Spain and beyond its borders. These songs of his made up the repertoire of his friend, Encarnación López, *la Argentinita,* with whom he made a set of gramaphone records, he playing the piano accompaniments, which is all that remains to us of his musical activities, one of the passions of his life, and which entitled him to the title he had given himself: "the madman of the folk songs."

His musical genius found expression in his poetry and his dramas, in which, in varying forms, music is always present. And another of his life-long passions, the presentation of plays, was a preparation and training for the creation of his own theatrical works. From childhood he had had a marionette theatre, first for the entertainment of his friends, and later presented in public, which he called "titeres de Cachiporra," where he put on the oldest piece of Spanish dramatic literature, the *Auto de los reyes magos,* and one of Cervantes' interludes, together with a little work of his own. This was the undertaking that was to culminate under the official patronage of the government of the Spanish Republic in "La Barraca," a theatre of strolling players which

carried to the villages of Spain the best of the classical Spanish theatre, revived, under Lorca's direction, in its original sixteenth-century form which proved itself completely modern.

These manifold activities, which would have filled the life of other men, were but a diversion for him, but into it he put, as into everything he did, his whole generous, enthusiastic soul. He lived in Granada and in Madrid, and he traveled about the villages and cities of Spain, equally attracted to all by their variety. In 1929 he left Spain to come to the United States where he spent a year in New York, in the city and in the country. That was a decisive year for him: the modernity of America left no impress on him; he sought beneath it the primordial, elemental qualities, nature, youth, the Negro. He was happy in the United States, because the contact with a contrasting world strengthened and affirmed his deep Spanish essence. And although he made no effort to assimilate this new world, and, on the contrary, tended to react against it, he felt for it a secret sympathy and understanding. It signified to him the discovery of America, where his spirit, so exaggeratedly Spanish, and for that very reason, so little European, felt itself at home. But his great experience in America was his coming into contact with Spanish America, for which his stay in the United States was the preparation and the threshold. In Spain he had already been attracted by the literature of Spanish America, and he admired Rubén Darío, Herrera y Reissig, Pablo Neruda; he had always had many Spanish American friends, and their number was increased in the cosmopolitan world of New York. And when he went to Cuba from New York in 1930, his stay there signified his complete, spontaneous incorporation into the life of America. Because it was not only that he was happy in America, but that the Spanish Americans received him as one of themselves, both as a writer and a person, without a trace of prejudice against his unmistakable, unshakable Spanishness. When, later, in 1933, he went to Buenos Aires, he met with a welcome in that cosmopolitan world on the Plate such as had been accorded no other foreign writer. In Cuba he wrote Cuban *sones* as intimate in their emotion as that of his Andalusian poems of "deep song"; in the Argentine, definitely oriented toward the theatre,

he presented works of his own and of Lope de Vega, directed by him, before huge audiences. He had received repeated invitations from Mexico, and was planning to go there just as the Civil War broke out in Spain. Had he done so, it would have saved his life. But instead he went to Granada, where he met death at the very moment his glory was at its height on both sides of the Atlantic, and his creative powers at their peak.

All his life he was a poet, who lived his poetry and wrote it, with fullness, passion and irregularity, as though in obedience to an inescapable demand of his temperament. That he never regarded poetry as a profession, but as life itself, is apparent from the fact that he recited or read to his friends the works he wrote, and they were famous long before they appeared in print. It is a curious and thoughtful phenomenon that an author so close to us in time, whose popularity and success outdistanced that of his fellow poets, and even that commonly enjoyed by any poet, should have been so indifferent to the publication of his works as to make it a problem for critics to establish their chronology. He was reluctant to publish his work in book form, and for that reason, some of his most important poetic works did not appear until years after they were written. *Poema del cante jondo,* written between 1921-22, did not appear until 1931; *Canciones* (1921-1924) until 1927; others, which had been published in journals and reviews, like the *Oda a Salvador Dalí* and the *Oda al Santisimo Sacramento* did not appear in book form until the posthumous edition of his complete works (Buenos Aires, Losada, 1938), and the poems he wrote in the United States, until they were published in Mexico in a volume entitled *Poeta en Nueva York.* Many other poems and the greater part of his dramatic work were not published or collected until after his death. Some of his books of poetry and dramatic compositions are lost. It is not difficult to guess at the reasons for this apparent indifference toward his own work, which, rather than indifference, was the standard of originality and perfection he set himself, his absorption in the work yet to be created rather than in that already accomplished. Lorca lived in a critical moment, in which all the arts were striving for originality and the superation of the past by new and difficult methods, and

Lorca, a conscious artist despite his seeming spontaneity, imperiously felt the need to give his art, with its deep roots in the past, complete contemporary validity. He was and he wanted to be a man of his period, but without renouncing an atom of himself, in whom there were many links with the past which made him incompatible with the transitory fashions of the moment. He wished to avoid both the applause of the hide-bound majorities and the criticism of the ultra-modern minorities, both of which only partially understood him, and find his own path in a harmony between the new and the age-old native qualities that were fused in him. This was what he did in his poetry and it is this that gave him a place that is in a sense unique among contemporary Spanish poets.

In his first work, *Libro de poemas,* published in 1921, which contains his early poems, there are a variety of tendencies in which the influence of his immediate predecessors, the Spanish and Spanish-American poets known as the *Modernistas,* is apparent, and there is much that is new, as a matter of fact, all that is to appear, enriched and developed, in his later work. The germ of the dominant strain in his poetry until 1924, and which persists throughout his work, acquiring further development in his theatre, is to be found in the lyric folk poetry of Spain, which constitutes the essential character of his *Poema del cante jondo* (1921-1922) and his *Canciones* (1921-1924).

Let us examine in its simplest form, as far as the limitations of translation will permit, how Lorca creates poetry that is his own and modern, using the meaningless words of the folk songs without adding anything:

TO IRENE GARCÍA

In the grove
The poplar saplings dance
Each with the other.
And the tree-oh
With its four new leaves
Dances, too.
Irene!
Then come the rains

And the snows.
Dance on the green.
On the green green
And I will dance with you.
Ah me, how the water flows by,
Ah me, my heart!
In the grove
The poplar saplings dance
Each with the other.
And the tree-oh,
With its four new leaves
Dances, too.

There is not a word or an image in this poem that does not come from a series of old songs that the folk sing throughout Spain. Lorca is not imitating any of them; he bears them all within himself, as do the folk, and they well up in him reduced to the essence of their rhythm and their poetic mood. The pure folk poetry, which when it is authentic resides wholly in rhythms and words without direct meaning, coincides here with the pure poetry which surrealism was seeking. But it differs from the latter in having its roots in the collective sub-conscious, which is at one and the same time individual, local and universal.

In his book *Canciones* we find other simple examples of fundamental and permanent motifs employed by Lorca, in which he is proceeding toward a pure poetry, divorced from reality. His ever-present infantilism is apparent in this brief poem:

SILLY SONG

Mama,
I wish I were silver.

Son,
You'd be very cold.

Mama,
I wish I were water.

Son,
You'd be very cold.

Mama,
Embroider me on your pillow.

That I will,
This very minute.

And his ironical treatment of love:

IT IS TRUE

Oh, what an effort it is
To love you as I do!
For love of you
the air
and my heart
and my hat
hurt me.
Who will buy
this ribbon of mine
and this grief of white
linen to make handkerchiefs?
Oh, what an effort it is
To love you as I do!

In his *Canciones,* as in the *Poema del cante jondo,* there are poems which already contain the germ cell of his subsequent *Romancero gitano, Llanto por Ignacio Sánchez Mejías,* and his dramas. These are brief, significant compositions in which, using the rhythm of the folk song and the local Andalusian setting, the elemental drama of life with death ever-present is the theme. *Rider's Song* is a perfect example:

RIDER'S SONG

Cordoba,
Distant and lonely.
Black filly, full moon,
and olives in my saddle-bag.
Even though I know the roads
I never shall reach Cordoba.
Across the plain, through the air,
black filly, red moon,
Death has its eyes upon me,
from the towers of Cordoba.

Alas, how long the road!
Alas, my stout-hearted filly!
Alas, Death is waiting for me,
Before I ever reach Cordoba.
Cordoba,
Distant and lonely.

We shall not enter upon an analysis of his *Romancero Gitano,* which followed, between 1924 and 1927, whose publication in 1928 won Lorca unanimous acclaim throughout the Spanish-speaking world. Those elements we have pointed out in his earlier work, the popular and the cultivated, the local and the universal, all achieved full flowering here, as later on, in his most inspired work, the elegy for the death of the bull-fighter Ignacio Sánchez Mejías, a man whose like one rarely meets, and a great friend of Lorca's and of mine.

Earlier, in 1926 and 1928, respectively, he published his odes to Salvador Dalí and to the Blessed Sacrament, and later, his poems of New York, in which he developed separately the surrealist aspect, which was oneiric and baroque in his Gipsy Ballads, and here is Cubist, Catholic, and cosmopolitan.

From the dramatism of his *Canciones* his theatre, too, came as a matter of course, the theatre which had so interested him as a child, and which develops along with his poetry and parallel to it, until it finally became the most important form of his work in his later years. It is represented by a variety of works, some comic, others tragic, others surrealist, which have been produced everywhere, in spite of the difficulty their translation offers. The individual analysis of these works may be found in the writings of the many critics who have studied Lorca, among them Angel del Río, Martínez Nadal, J. A. Crow, Edwin Honig and Arturo Barea, several of which are available in English. Taking his plays as a whole, it can be said that in his ironical farces for marionettes, as in his great rural dramas, the same fusion of the popular and the cultivated, the traditional and the modern that characterized his poetry is to be found. Whether in prose or in verse, his theatre is essentially poetic and musical. Poetry and music form the background of the action or are in the very structure of the action, which is always stylized and

unrealized even when, as in his final tragedies, it seems most real and crude. The endeavor and achievement of Lorca was to reduce his theatre to the elemental, the basic, the eternal in laughter and in sorrow, in love and in death.

The unity of this diversified work of Lorca and the merit of his poetic personality consists, then, in the fact that his poetry is timeless, for in it the most advanced aspects of the new aesthetic concepts are fused and identified with those deep-rooted in tradition. This, we believe, is a characteristic of all the great poets of all times, and for this reason we believe Lorca to be one of them.

The traditional elements of his work are both popular and literary. The past for him is folklore, not history. On the rare occasions when he deals with a historical subject, as in the case of his drama *Mariana Pineda,* what he gives us is the popular interpretation of a real episode, and a song sung by the children is the leit motiv of the work. The timeless folk, the living folk of Granada and of Spain, of which as a child he was a part, is the sum of a multitude of secular traditions which are fused in its unmistakable character and behavior. Granada is the point of intersection of all the traditions that have gone into the formation of Spain; upon the primitive Spanish substratum, the contributions of Roman and Arab, Galician and Castilian, Gipsy and American were blended there more completely, perhaps, than at any other point in the great process of the unity of Spain in the sixteenth century. In this millenary stratum the poetry and the theatre of Federico García Lorca has its roots, not as something he approaches from the outside, but which he bears within himself, the core and essence of his own soul. Since the fifteenth century Granada has been one of the great literary themes of Spain and of the world in its exotic, oriental aspect. But this oriental Granada, with its historic evocations, the Granada of the frontier ballads, the Moorish novels of the sixteenth century and the dramas of Moors and Christians, the Granada of Chateaubriand and Washington Irving, Zorrilla, Ganivet and Villaespesa is not that of Federico García Lorca. The literary sources of his poetry are in the folk of today and in the long tradition of Spanish writers of every epoch who sought

their inspiration in the folk. These include the greatest writers Spain has produced in the high-water moments of its history: Juan de la Encina and Gil Vicente in the Renaissance; Cervantes and Lope de Vega in the Golden Age; Antonio Machado, his brother Manuel and José Moreno Villa in the twentieth century. In his day each of these authors—and many others we need not mention—knew how to give new life to the eternal sentiments of the folk in accord with the changing, new aesthetic value of each epoch. Lorca did the same for his epoch, and thus there was repeated in him the most authentic manner of creation Spanish genius assumes when it is at its best, which is the marriage of the cultivated and the popular. Thus, both in his poetry and in his theatre, the writers Lorca most resembles are the Portuguese Gil Vicente and the Spaniard, Lope de Vega, and each of the three is as original and as different as were their respective worlds.

In all three of them the lyric goes hand in hand with dramatic, the traditional with the modern, the tragic with the comic, the fantastic with the realistic, the local with the universal; and although each of them is intensely personal, they coincide surprisingly in many of their technical procedures, and all manage to convey in their work what we feel is the essence of that which is Spanish.

Lorca may, then, be regarded as the most purely and essentially Spanish writer of our day and, consequently, the one hardest to translate and understand. Spanish through and through, his art resides in the words and not in the ideas; in the music, the gesture, the physical sensations and the irrational emotions, in a play of forms, rhythms and images which conceal beneath them the mystery of life and of death. It demands an effort on our part to understand him as he was, and to see his work as a poetic creation of pure art in which we find anew, stripped of history, of picturesque romanticism and genre realism, a clear, profound vision of the eternal Spain.

Hart Crane

ALAN SWALLOW

I am one who looks upon the career of Hart Crane with bitterness. And I submit that it is difficult for a poet to write even today, nearly seventeen years after his suicide, about a poet who is so much an object-lesson in all that we think and do. Indeed, I would gladly go so far as does Yvor Winters and extend the comment; for Crane is not only an object-lesson for the poet today but also for Professor X, for the professor of English and American history and literature.

Crane's history is so commonly known that I need recapitulate it very briefly here. He was born nearly fifty years ago, on July 21, 1899, in a small Ohio town. From a pioneer heritage of trekking from New England to the Western Reserve country and then of moving from the farm to business, Crane's father became a wealthy candy manufacturer in Cleveland. When Hart Crane was seventeen, his mother and father separated; the youth, who had already started to write poetry, sided with his mother. An ambivalent attitude toward his father—rejecting the commercialism of the parent at the same desiring recognition from him—was apparently only an initial and perhaps precipitating agent for the many ambivalences which plagued Hart Crane through-

out his life. Always he alternated between hate for his father and a desire to please him; between trying to adjust to a commercial culture and rejecting adjustment to the standards of his society; between periods of exaltation and depression. The alternations gradually became more frequent as his life continued; they were stimulated by the problems of homosexuality and by his drunkenness and sexual excess. When it appeared that his most ambitious poem was largely a failure and he was unwilling or could not return to certain earlier and more successful modes of writing, he surely became manic depressive. After a year in Mexico, on April 27, 1932, as Crane was returning to New York, he threw himself into the sea.

Self-destruction ended the greatest poetic talent ever seen in America. It is a pitiful story which has affected all who have been interested in recent American poetry. Unfortunately, it is a story which has not brought a great deal of reflection upon its meanings. Crane has become, for a few, the poet who most brilliantly worked—as Crane himself occasionally thought—in a direction opposed to what was thought the world-weariness and negativism of T. S. Eliot. But as it turned out, Crane was the one most world-weary and most negative, and Eliot has survived to win a Nobel prize.

Crane's suicide was in 1932, the year, it is to be remembered, at the bottom of the depression. Immediately he was considered to be martyr to America's social and economic follies; shortly his name was on the lips of those who had thought they could not understand his poetry before. Since that time the legend of his martyrdom and the attention brought to his verse have made him what might be called the poet's poet of our day; his influence has been second only to that of Eliot.

In one respect, I believe Crane's influence has been greater than that of Eliot. And that is that probably several times as many poems have been written about Crane as about Eliot. My associate editor, John Williams, started an anthology of these poems which we had thought of publishing for the fiftieth anniversary of Crane's birth. I am not certain that the collection has any considerable poetic power, and surely it is more enlightening about the attitudes of poets toward their craft than

it is about Crane. These poets have put Crane in the center of almost every imaginable response to the craft of poetry and the position of the poet in our culture: there are many English poets represented as well as American, they run the gamut from the Freudian interpretation of a poem by Brewster Ghiselin to the directly Marxist of David Wolff. There is not space to quote from the several dozen examples, but two of the best, to my mind, are by Richard Esler and Yvor Winters. The last stanza of Esler's "At the Grave of Hart Crane" is

> There is for me no word beyond the Word,
> For him no fear beyond a futile fear;
> And I was driven to forget the spring
> And walk in the lost strict fabric of the year.

And the last stanza of Winters' "Orpheus, In Memory of Hart Crane" is

> Yet the fingers on the lyre
> Spread like an avenging fire.
> Crying loud, the immortal tongue,
> From the empty body wrung,
> Broken in the bloody dream,
> Sang unmeaning down the stream.

Certainly the poems about Hart Crane serve to demonstrate that Crane could mean different things to the poets who honored either his career as poet or his career as martyr. At first the career as martyr was of dominant interest. Crane was the latest example of the homeless modern poet, the poet who lived in a culture which could not sustain him either as writer of poetry or as person of sensitivity. It was not a new story. Probably no poet in England or America had felt at home in his culture since the time of Dryden. Various types of homelessness had been characteristic of poets before: bohemianism, sensational living, sexual and other perversion, all had been common for nearly two centuries. Bitterness, sporadic and unsystematic revolutionism, even prophecy and oracularism had been characteristic of many. And, in the extremes, had been the madness of Crabbe, Blake, Clare, and the second James Thomson; there had been

the effort to seek unconsciousness of pain in Coleridge, Poe, and others, and the greater effort to interrupt the continuity of modern experience of chaos in such people as Rimbaud, D. H. Lawrence, and the developing surrealists; and there was the suicide of Vachel Lindsay and Crane's friend Harry Crosby, and the kind of "cultural suicide" of Rimbaud. Pain, homelessness, chaos were the common heritage of modern poets, and Crane suffered from the heritage more than most.

Insofar as anything so abstract and divorced from individual responsibility can be thought to blame—a culture, I suppose, can be blamed for its heritage. But the culture does not dictate the response to it; it may demand or exhort a response, but it cannot dictate the response completely. What is more remarkable than the failures of poets in the last century and a half is the number of great successes. Crane himself added a few pieces to this body of achievement. Indeed, if the culture is to be blamed, it is to be blamed not so much for the kind of isolation and pain forced upon the poet as for the kind of ideas it handed him for his use. Crane, then, is the most spectacular example of a double-edged fault which has affected poetry for many generations: on the one side is the fault of a society, itself so shoddy and chaotic that it cannot justly nourish its artistic talent, and hardly any better its scientific and inventive talent; and on the other side is the fault of a group of shoddy ideas about poetry and art which the modern poet inherits and which are probably more difficult to throw off than the shackles of a famishing society. I am well aware that the two are intimately connected, but perhaps the division can be permitted here, for the moment, for what value it may have in this discussion.

And Crane was killed with a two-edged ax: one edge was honed sharp by the materialistic culture in which he was born, and the other edge was honed sharp by the ideas of Poe and Emerson and Whitman and Pound and Eliot; swinging the ax was Crane himself, and he used the two-edged ax to cut himself down.

I should like, now, to detail some of those ideas and their effect upon Crane's verse, and, finally, to devote some space to Crane's most successful poetry.

Crane was a brilliant example of the kind of poet so desired by the Romantics—the untutored youth who could speak great poetry. He was one of the least educated of modern poets; he quit high school after three years and, although he reported that his father had set aside money for his college work, he never used it. He had started writing poetry when he was thirteen, was publishing in the advanced journals of his day when he was seventeen and eighteen, at twenty-three he had thought of his largest conception, the idea for *The Bridge,* and he never matured to any large extent after that age. After he completed *The Bridge,* overwhelmed with a sense of its failures, it appears that he regressed to even more youthful ideas, and he committed suicide when thirty-two.

Untutored and youthful as he was, it must not be thought that Crane was a man unaware of the philosophic currents of his day. Indeed, it appears that he knew nearly all of them, and as a writer of prose he was quite conscious of these philosophic directions. And it is not to be thought that if he had had more education he would have been a better poet; this is an idle speculation, and it is quite possible to think that the schools, never noted for their fostering of genius, could have done him more harm than good. But, being untutored and youthful and striving to develop a point of view of his own, he in fact sampled the ideas current in the poetry and criticism of his day and gave them all a try in his thinking and in his poetry. In his poetry and in his life it is quite possible to chart most of the important influences upon poetry during the time of its publicized renaissance.

Crane, like Pound and Eliot before him, started out under an attachment to the immediately preceding poetry he knew—that of the late Romantics, Swinburne, Wilde, and the Pre-Raphaelites. Its attention upon an aural pattern and upon decorative image is evident in Crane's first published poem, "C 33":

He has woven rose-vines
About the empty heart of night,
And vented his long mellowed wines
Of dreaming on the desert white
With searing sophistry.

And he tented with far truths he would form
The transient bosoms from the thorny tree.

But, like those older men, he quickly found this verse quite appalling. At the time, he was in New York—eighteen years old —and learning something of the exciting developments there; he was reading Marlowe, Donne, Rimbaud, Laforgue; but he was also reading, with more immediate effect, the work of Melville, Whitman, Sherwood Anderson. Two of his early prose pieces were appreciation of Anderson. Advanced literature was dividing rather clearly into two groups: one we might call the sophisticate, which collected to its arms the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, the French Symbolists, and had as its leaders such writers as Joyce, Pound, and Eliot, with such magazines as *The Little Review* and *Others* as its publications; the other was that which felt itself indigenous and traced its ancestry to Emerson, Whitman, Melville, and had as its leaders such people as Dreiser, Anderson, Sandburg, Masters, Lindsay and, at a critical level, those who sought an American myth, such as Waldo Frank and Gorham Munson, two who remained among Crane's closest literary friends; its magazines were *Seven Arts, Masses,* and *Pagany,* to which Crane shortly contributed.

Crane never clearly fell into either group. When arguments among them were forced upon him, he temporarily lost a friend or made a statement he later regretted; but of all the poets of his time he most attempted and achieved a synthesis of the two. His own practice and thinking demonstrate that the two were not essentially far apart in their dictates for the method to be used by the poet.

Let us take the American tradition, as we may call it, first. Poe has had a remarkable influence upon modern poetry, but mainly indirectly through a subterranean passage of the practice of the French Symbolists; there he most affected Pound and Eliot. Crane, too, was thus affected, but he is perhaps the only important modern American poet who read Poe directly as progenitor. It is difficult, however, to trace this influence exactly. Crane immediately recognized the faults of Poe's impressionism and his poor verse texture; but he apparently liked the rhythms

and, with this as one reason among many, never did like the free verse of the Pound-Eliot practice. In Poe he found a fascination with the sea, which became Crane's greatest symbol, and such correlate images as the Isle, Bell Isle. There are a few other direct contacts between Poe's work and Crane's, notably in the evocation of Poe's image in "The Tunnel" section of *The Bridge* and in one or two parallel passages.

But the influence of Emerson and Whitman was more direct. In these two Crane found justification for being the innocent and untutored and child-like; Crane was almost the living embodiment of the Emerson and Whitman idea of the poet. Yvor Winters has ably argued, in his essay on Crane, the essence of the Emersonian doctrines, and I need only paraphrase the argument here. Emerson has said, "No man need be perplexed in his speculations. Let him do and say what strictly belongs to him, and though very ignorant of books, his nature shall not yield him any intellectual obstructions and doubts." He recommended "abandonment to the nature of things"; he said "that only in our easy, simple spontaneous action we are strong, and by contenting ourselves with obedience we become divine." Thus the counsel was surrender to the changing flow of experience and to impressionism and even to unconsciousness. Emerson—as well as others—lies behind the doctrine of automatic writing.

Crane was early attracted to Sherwood Anderson because he thought Anderson was so close to the undirected experience of men and women in the small towns; he once asked Munson, as early as 1919, if the success of Dreiser, Anderson, and Frost had not been achieved "more through natural unconsciousness than with a mind thoroughly logical or propagandistic." He all through his life felt that his primary job was to explore the emotions, his own emotions, as completely as possible. The poetry of John Donne stood for him as "a dark, musky, brooding, speculative vintage, at once sensual and spiritual, and singing rather the beauty of experience than innocence." Whitman, Anderson, and Emerson would have shown, then, the beauty of innocence.

In a strict sense, there is no difference—to use Crane's terms—between "sensual and spiritual." The godhood, the over-soul, is

in each of us; by obedience to the inner impulse and insight only can we become divine. This doctrine naturally gathered to it a great many ideas which appealed to Crane. First was the attitude of contempt for the bourgeoisie and the feeling that the artist has the role of bringing new insight to them; an interesting experience of this kind is a passage from a letter in which Crane writes of Isadora Duncan's visit to Cleveland:

> You, as well as some of my local friends, must share in my excitement at seeing Isadora Duncan dance on Sunday night. She gave the same program (All Tschaikowsky) that she gave in Moscow for the Soviet celebration and, I think, you saw it in New York recently. It was glorious beyond words, and sad beyond words too, from the rude and careless reception she got here. It was like a wave of life, a flaming gale that passed over the heads of the nine thousand in the audience without evoking response other than silence and some maddening cat-calls. After the first movement of the "Pathetique" she came to the fore of the stage, her hands extended. Silence—the most awful silence! I started clapping furiously until she disappeared behind the draperies. At least one tiny sound should follow her from all that audience. She continued through the performance with utter indifference for the audience and with such intensity of gesture and such plastique grace as I have never seen although the music was sometimes almost drowned out by the noises from the hall. I felt like rushing to the stage, but I was stimulated almost beyond the power to walk straight. When it was all over she came to the fore-stage again in the little red dress that had so shocked Boston, as she stated, and among other things told the people to go home and take from the bookshelf the works of Walt Whitman and turn to the section called "Calamus." Ninety-nine percent of them had never heard of Whitman, of course, but that was part of the beauty of her gesture. Glorious to see her there with her right breast and nipple quite exposed, telling the audience that the truth was not pretty, that it was really indecent, and telling them (boobs!) about Beethoven, Tschaikowsky, and Scriabine.

Another appealing idea was that the American tradition involved some kind of robustness and earthiness; Crane once said that the refiners of poetry were Williams, Moore, Stevens, but

that the robust talent lay with Masters, Lindsay, and Sandburg. Crane was also much affected by the doctrine of searching for new sensations, indicated by Emerson and voiced so loudly by Whitman; in writing to Allen Tate about Eliot, Crane said early in his career: "I would like to leave a few of his negations behind me, risk the realm of the obvious more, in quest of new sensations, humours." This doctrine quickly gets a mystic glow which Crane recognized. The poet might be, as in Shelley's phrase, an unacknowledged legislator to the world: he created new conceptions; by following the dictates of association and the metaphor he led to new, if illogical, insights; art, in this doctrine, is the search for new insight and for beauty. And, by a simple extension of the doctrine into the chaos of modern society, the poet quickly assumes a prophetic role—as did Emerson and Whitman: the man of letters in the twentieth century is a pioneer on new frontiers, seeking the mystically new; as in Crane's original conception of *The Bridge,* the poet might perform the prophetic role of erecting a bridge between the modern man's past and his future, showing him the mystical meanings behind the apparent chaos of his present. He could apprehend, as Whitman tried, the spirit of America. He continually dreamed and conquered new forms of life. The poet could lead the people to see that the meaning of present existence was linked with a past and with a glorious future. And, as one step along the way, the poet could, as Crane said in an essay on modern poetry, "absorb the machine, i.e., acclimatize it as naturally and casually as trees, cattle, galleons, castles, and all other human associations in the past." His own effort in this direction—attempted also by Sandburg, Stephen Spender, and others—is indicated by the much-anthologized passage from "Cape Hatteras" beginning "The nasal whine of power whips a new universe." "It involves," Crane said, interestingly enough, along with traditional qualifications of the poet, "an extraordinary capacity for surrender, at least temporarily, to the sensations of urban life." This is Emerson almost by the word!

From this "American" tradition, Crane could have it both ways: he once quoted in an essay on Anderson a passage from one of Anderson's letters which read, "I am in truth mighty little

interested in any discussions of art or life, or what a man's place in the scheme of things may be. It has to be done, I suppose, but after all there is the fact of life. Its story wants telling and singing. That's what I want—the tale and the song of it." And, on the other hand, Crane could have the privilege of Whitman's role of the prophet. Surely only in the Emersonian doctrine of surrender to flux could it be thought that these roles could be bound together. Crane, of all the "robust" followers of the doctrine, was the one who took it seriously and tested it with his great talent. He found that the prophecy arrived at was faulty, and the failure of *The Bridge* was a contributing factor to his death.

We may now turn to what we are for the moment calling the sophisticate tradition. Instead of the role of the Isadore Duncan bringing culture to a people, the poet here has the role of the clown. This role is an old insight—it is found throughout nineteenth-century poetry, in Eliot's Prufrock and in others of his characters; Pound's career has been largely that of the clown. Crane's fullest statement of this is in his poem "Chaplinesque." It is a difficult poem, but the "we" of the poem, Crane once explained, includes Chaplin and the poet; the kitten represents the waifs whom Chaplin, the clown, would give succor:

> We make our meek adjustments,
> Contented with such random consolations
> As the wind deposits
> In slithered and too ample pockets.
>
> For we can still love the world, who find
> A famished kitten on the step, and know
> Recesses for it from the fury of the street,
> Or warm torn elbow coverts.
>
> We will sidestep, and to the final smirk
> Dally the doom of that inevitable thumb
> That slowly chafes its puckered index toward us,
> Facing the dull squint with what innocence
> And what surprise!
>
> And yet these fine collapses are not lies
> More than the pirouettes of any pliant cane;

Our obsequies are, in a way, no enterprise.
We can evade you, and all else but the heart:
What blame to us if the heart live on.

The game enforces smirks; but we have seen
The moon in lonely alleys make
A grail of laughter of an empty ash can,
And through all sound of gaiety and quest
Have heard a kitten in the wilderness.

Like the famous figure of the Tramp in American literature, the figure of the clown in our sophisticated literature—and of the court minstrel in an older literature—is that of the naif, the person too innocent and innately pure to comprehend the forces which work upon him, or to stop traveling the endless road which he believes will end in fulfilment of desire and the capture of beauty.

Crane immediately recognized that this greater sophistication provided subtleties and possibilities the robustness of the "Americans" could not provide. Pound had once said that Whitman was the poet who broke the wood on which Pound would do the carving. At one level this involved a quality of language. Pound had revolutionized the language of poetry and provided a new diction, a denser diction than for any poetry at least since Blake. And Crane appreciated the possibilities of this language. He once wrote to Tate that he was working "hard for a more perfect lucidity" of language. By that he meant—as in the doctrine of Eliot—that the word would be used with several layers of meaning; each layer could be peeled away to divulge another as lucid as the one before.

As a result of this practice and the criticism of Eliot and of Richards, among others, Crane developed a theory to justify his own handling of elliptical expressions. He called it the "logic of metaphor." The starting point seems to have been in Crane's use of the word *mirror*. For him, an image was a mirror; it flashed back to the poet and to the reader his own emotion and feeling; it flashed back reality. In an early poem, "Legend," he wrote:

As silent as a mirror is believed
Realities plunge in silence by . . . .

Until the bright logic is won
Unwhispering as a mirror
Is believed.

Then, drop by caustic drop, a perfect cry
Shall string some constant harmony,—
Relentless caper for all those who step
The legend of their youth into the noon.

But the mirror-image is more than mirror, as he later discovered; it leads into reality, it *explores* reality. This conception is more dynamic than that, say, of MacLeish, who said

For all the history of grief
an empty doorway and a maple leaf.

MacLeish had the mirror-image conception, but not the conception of the image as means of leading into reality and exploring it. Following Eliot and Richards, Crane justified the associational metaphor on the basis of "pseudo-statement," that is, that poetry need not stand the test of examination with traditional logic. Instead, there is another kind of "truth," a truth non-scientifically determined, which is stated and explored in the immediate apprehension of the combinations of the metaphor. Crane thus absorbed the dominant attitude of poetry of his time —that poetic truth is different from scientific truth, yet valuable for its difference; that the poet is not a man of thought but a man who has techniques, through the metaphor and other devices, of exploring and communicating precise or vague emotion; the better the metaphor, the more precise the mirror of emotion.

The fallacies of this position have been well indicated by Yvor Winters: a language which is primarily connotative in intent gradually loses its power; the use of language with connotative intent and with ignorance of denotative intent is the use of one crutch instead of two; a poem depending upon the "logic of metaphor" is a poem without a subject or content. The difficulty is indicated even in one of Crane's remarks. In his essay on modern poetry, Crane said, "When Blake wrote that 'a tear is an intellectual thing, And a sigh is the sword of the Angel King'—

he was not in any logical conflict with the principles of the Newtonian Universe." Blake, fortunately, understood this better than did Crane; he knew that his ideas were in conflict with Newtonian science and he, in fact, thought that Newton was a creature of the devil.

On one important principle, the "sophisticated" school of Pound and Eliot completely joined hands with the "American" school, and that is the principle of organic form. Crane seemed at times to see the difficulties of the principle, for he often spoke of the necessity of the poet to give form to the chaotic experience of modern industrial life. But the impact of the principle was too strong on a man who tried almost all ideas, particularly an idea which permeated the writing of the most powerful and even divergent influences of his day. When Crane was working on *The Bridge* and finding it hard going to whip the conception, in which he had largely given up faith, into its final form, one of the sections remaining to be done was "The River." He wrote to friends that it would not "spill" out its "organic form (there is always just *one*)." He had come to be able to write only under the pressure of a new conception and in highly excited emotional state; the poem had to come shaped from his original insight or he found it nearly impossible to get it down at all. Indeed, while he was finishing up *The Bridge,* he wrote to Munson: "God knows, some kind of substantial synthesis of opinion is needed before I can feel confident in writing about anything but my shoestrings . . . These Godless days! I wonder if you suffer as much as I do. At least you have had the education and training to hold the scalpel." Note the need that the form be presented to him; his doctrine of organic form required that form be given to him with the conception, or he could not attain form.

A number of curious ideas flow logically from the doctrine of organic form, and Crane, I believe, knew them all. The doctrine simply says that the job of the poet is to *discover* the form of an experience; the poet is a *discoverer,* not a *maker.* To Crane and Eliot and many others, modern life was chaotic, lacking spiritual or other direction. Thus, the form of experience, and of poetry also, must have those characteristics; this explains, for example, the romantic irony, the twists and shocks, in much of Eliot's early

practice. The doctrine is one whereby the poet may surrender to his material, not manage it. If one is mystical in the Emersonian sense, he need not worry about this surrender, for the apparent chaos of flux is only apparent chaos; the presence of the over-soul in the flux makes it directional. As Winters has pointed out, such people as Emerson, Whitman, and Eliot had certain reserves, of character or habit or whatever, which prevented complete exploration of the doctrine of surrender; only Pound, apparently, and Hart Crane had, at times, the sensibility and the power to do so. Crane could surrender. As early as the fall of 1922 he wrote some friends: "I want to keep saying 'Yes' to everything and never be beaten a moment." And his biographer Brom Weber (to whose work I am indebted for quotations from "C 33" and for the many quotations from letters used in this essay) points out that all the spiritual strains of his life, despite their pain, combined to make him consider the flux of events as the expression of forces more powerful and true than himself, and therefore to be welcomed rather than rejected. Indeed, he borrowed three further doctrines from the general theory. One was that only in the experience of artistic endeavor (or in unconsciousness) could one escape the surrender or participate in it selflessly. Another was that the surrender was most valuable when there was most immersion in feeling; like Thomas Wolfe, Crane believed in the efficacy of strong sensation, from drunkenness to whatever else. And the third, which links up with the long tradition of pain and isolation I have already indicated for the poet in western culture, was that through immersion in pain came the greatest understanding and spiritual insight. Shelley had expressed it innocuously and innocently when he said, "Our sincerest laughter with some pain is fraught; the sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought." Only a Rimbaud or a Crane, who thought that he was Rimbaud's heir, could take the idea completely seriously and live it.

Under the doctrine, then, pain was necessary to insight. "The Tunnel" section of *The Bridge* evokes the figure of Poe and his pain and the long history of exploring degradation as a means of getting at the essential and simple knowledge. This interest in degradation had dominated much literature for a century.

Again, Crane felt that a certain amount of confusion was necessary in experience before the artist could bring it into form. And finally, the ultimate conclusion of the direction is indicated by an event in Crane's life in 1930. A friend had suggested to Crane that he should submit to psychoanalysis to see if that could help his psychological state. Crane refused, and he did so on grounds—perfectly sound grounds, under an extension from the doctrine of organic form—that he couldn't be sure disorder wasn't responsible for his past achievements and that his talent for new achievements wouldn't be destroyed by greater order in his own life!

The case of Hart Crane is surely that of the greatest poetic talent ever born in America, not fostered or provided a true home in the culture into which he was born, and bred upon a group of ideas which he inherited from Poe, Emerson, Whitman, the French Symbolists, Pound, Eliot (and also from the men who shaped the thoughts of those men) —a group of ideas which Crane had the great ability to explore fully as no other among them, except possibly Pound, had the talent to explore. What is the result? Pound is now in a mental institution, and Crane destroyed himself. I prefer to think that among all the forces upon Crane, the forces of these ideas were sufficient to destroy him.

I now want to try to assess what residue is left from Crane's career. The full book of his work is not large, and most of the work in it must be scattered to dust. The doctrines he used would produce poetry almost by miracle; but Crane was at times a mystic and himself a miracle, as with genius, and at times the miracle of important composition happened to him.

First of all, there is the great verbal magic of his lines. Mainly they make only fragments. To try to list all of them would be an arduous and not significant task. But I wish to use only a few phrases to indicate the great "logic of metaphor" he could command; meantime, these lines and the methods behind them will prepare us for a better reading of the full poems I shall consider.

Some of the best of these lines are those dealing with mystical experience. By definition, I suppose, the mystical experience is not amenable to usual logical expression; only the metaphor will

do it adequately. In one of his early poems, "Possessions," Crane concluded:

> The pure possession, the inclusive cloud
> Whose heart is fire shall come,—the white wind raze
> All but bright stones wherein our smiling plays.

This is, I believe, a true metaphysical metaphor; that is, it progresses intellectually as well as sensibly. The experience of possession is here mystical, the possession of the apprehension of truth; in that experience is the heart of fire in the midst of an inclusive cloud; the wind, which surely comes by association from the cloud and the breath which feeds the fire, is white with purity; yet even such purity can raze, can raze all consciousness of another possession, a worldly possession of goods, shall we say; but it cannot raze the essential thing, "the bright stones wherein our smiling plays." Here the imaginative leap is great. The stones are bright, I suppose, spiritually, analogous to the white wind; they are stones because stones are the most permanent things known to man's senses and the most indestructible; in this permanence are plays or delights, and our smiling has a home, as perhaps in heaven.

Another is much more brief, from the poem "Recitative," in which Crane surely comes close to capturing the experience of time as a unity which Whitman and Eliot so endeavor to attain. It is a specious effort, perhaps; at least the confusion of time is very much like the confusion of subject which lies at the heart of Eliot's connotative handling of language; but here is Crane's effort to put it into a metaphor:

> In alternating bells have you not heard
> All hours clapped dense into a single stride?

I shall not pause over it except to remark the word *dense*: if the perception of time as unity is possible, it must be dense, for it combines past, present, and future into one.

One of the most remarked metaphors in all modern poetry occurs in two lines from the last section of *The Bridge*. The words are addressed to The Bridge as symbol which unites many things which we shall examine more closely below.

O Thou steeled Cognizance whose leap commits
The agile precincts of the lark's return.

I have many times participated in parlor games of argument concerning this metaphor. Is it metaphysical, with intellectual development, or is it merely operative at the sensory level? It is obviously sensory; we are supposed to see the bridge leaping through the air, which is the precincts of the lark's return. However, I am now convinced that it is intellectual, too. The bridge, by a species of expansion of a physical fact which delighted Crane so much, is a steeled cognizance (only a disciple of pantheism could, of course, believe that steel has cognizance) which in its leap across space does a great deal. First of all, the leap *commits;* it is statement and action; and it commits "the agile precincts of the lark's return." Once I would have thought this pure sensory derangement, as in the French Symbolists and their followers, for precincts cannot be agile; but the words attribute to the precincts a characteristic of the lark, which certainly can be agile. This, again, rests upon a particular mode of belief: the air and the earth, which are the precincts of the lark's return, are agile, alive, cognizant, possibly as much so as the bridge; but the aliveness has a direction, for they are not the precincts of the lark's flight or adventure, but of the lark's return, as if he were returning to his nest and home. I do not like to place the reading of these lines upon such a personal basis; but the "logic of metaphor" is so undemonstrable, at times, that one is left only with asserting the reading to which, at that moment, he has attained. Unfortunately, it remains assertion.

The number of Crane's poems which seem completely successful is quite small. His method, as with that of most modern poets, was not conducive to writing a rounded, completed poem but rather to the composition of brilliant passages; particularly is this true of one who strained the theories and the language so strongly, discontent with both used more tamely. Winters greatly admires only two: "Repose of Rivers" and "Voyages II." Tate has called "Praise for an Urn" the greatest elegy written in America. I shall comment on this core of three poems admired by such distinguished critics, plus a few others.

"Praise for an Urn" is an admirable poem which, as I return

to it again and again over the years, seems to me to work less and less successfully. The early parts of it, particularly, I now find vague and soft. I believe that it is not nearly so good an elegy as Edwin Arlington Robinson's "For a Dead Lady." In fact, "Praise for an Urn" is in part not so much an elegy as a critical comment on modern life, and I think that its last stanza, a fragment, makes a fine statement of a certain predicament in modern life:

> Scatter these well-meant idioms
> Into the smoky spring that fills
> The suburbs, where they will be lost.
> They are no trophies of the sun.

The poem combines, at a fairly high order, I think, awareness of the character of our cities, our suburbs, and our mechanized civilization with a fine apprehension of the romantic emotion of loss with which they may quite properly be viewed.

A very great statement of this loss, but more urgently and spiritually considered, is in "Voyages V." The opening of the poem is marred by verbal pyrotechnics and lack of control of the language, but this section, again a fragment, seems to me altogether admirable:

> For we
>
> Are overtaken. Now no cry, no sword
> Can fasten or deflect this tidal wedge,
> Slow tyranny of moonlight, moonlight loved
> And changed . . . "There's
>
> Nothing like this in the world," you say,
> Knowing I cannot touch your hand and look
> Too, into that godless cleft of sky
> Where nothing turns but dead sands flashing.
>
> "—And never to quite understand!" No,
> In all the argosy of your bright hair I dreamed
> Nothing so flagless as this piracy.

I submit that this is a very special kind of piracy; the spiritual

loss is greater, surely, than in Eliot's "The Hollow Men." (It is, by the way, a poem which is an echo of Poe's "The Sleeper.")

"Voyages VI" is also greatly to be admired. I can understand a refusal to like it, for it is one of the poems in which Crane is trying his best to grasp the image of true knowledge and belief, the source of permanence. Without a feeling for romantic pantheism, the poem is largely verbal trick. I shall not quote it but invite your reading of the catalog—which remains catalog, largely, I am afraid—of the images Crane uses for the idea of permanence.

For those who have read Winters' story "The Brink of Darkness," I think there will be recognition of the reason he has so admired Crane's "Repose of Rivers." The poem is the exploration of a similar problem to that of the story: the terror of the doctrine of surrender, the terror which lies at the heart of full acceptance of the Emerson, Whitman, Eliot notion of letting the experience shape itself. The Winters story and the Crane poem are the only two thorough examinations of the problem which I know in story or poem. "Repose of Rivers" is to be examined at leisure throughout the entire poem, for it is one of the few pieces by Crane which is great composition throughout its entirety.

Similarly do I agree with Winters concerning "Voyages II." I believe that it would be difficult to find any modern poem other than this one which would receive so great an unanimity of agreement upon its greatness among critics of various perspectives. Insofar as Eliot's *The Wasteland* has a subject, I believe that "Voyages II" has a similar subject. It is concerned with the basis for knowledge and faith, in other words with the descent through the wasteland to purgation, even death, to attain some permanence. It is thus upon the theme which most of the serious poets of the last fifty years have attempted at one time or another, and it is surely one of the greatest poems written on the theme.

I have left only a few paragraphs for a consideration of *The Bridge.* I suppose one might say that there have been three efforts, in recent times, to write major poems in English. One is Pound's *Cantos,* another is Eliot's *The Wasteland,* and the third is Crane's *The Bridge.* Perhaps there are others, but I do not

recall them at the moment. One should note that the effort of this kind by William Carlos Williams, *Patterson,* is partially completed.

Without a great deal more study, I should not like to hazard a guess concerning the comparative value of the three efforts. Pound's, as a matter of fact, is not completed, although we do not expect him to give us, in the last seventeen cantos, much work different from that he has given us in the first eighty-four. But certain it is that all three poems are very faulty poems. *The Cantos* and *The Wasteland* are very much alike in that their structure is the speaking voice of the Pound-Eliot conception of the cultured gentleman, like Coleridge, who reads widely and who has little faculty other than that of letting the unconscious and conscious mind work on the reading and regurgitate it in an associational pattern. Crane's at least was not like that, although I think his failure may have been greater.

The Bridge was conceived early as one of Crane's efforts at the role of the prophetic Whitman. He would write a poem which would explain the essential and ongoing spirit of America to the American people. But he could not do it with the shoddy nuances and sloppy feelings of a Sandburg talking about wheat in the Midwest or Chicago as hogbutcher of the world. He needed a tougher, denser language, and that involved a symbol; he even wanted a myth, and thereby lay one of his troubles. I do not know that anyone has demonstrated how myths arise (perhaps the rising young critics of myth will do it for us), but I am quite certain that a myth is not created by the assertion of one poet's will to myth. So *The Bridge* remains a symbol, not a myth, of American development. And also it does not achieve, as Crane hoped, a mystical apprehension of an American spirit; it is doubtful if there is any such spirit, but if there were, it would hardly be apprehended by considering only a few selected facets of American history.

The Bridge is a symbol of Crane's effort to suggest a way of uniting the American past with its destined future and thus to show the meaning of its present. *The Bridge,* of course, is Brooklyn Bridge, considered one of the mechanical beauties of our culture. Crane discovered, after he had left it, that he had lived

in the room occupied by the cripple who had supervised the construction of the bridge, and Crane even projected a biography of this little known engineer. The bridge is a physical fact, joining two shores. With the species of expansion upon a physical fact, which I have remarked above as particularly delightful to Crane, the bridge becomes extended as a symbol of material progress, the spanning of any two shores, however extensive. And then it moves to become a spiritual symbol, a link between cultures, between ideas, perhaps between God and man. In addition, the bridge, at the physical level, becomes other things. At times in the poem it becomes a ship, at times a world on which man stands, at other times a woman, and also, because of its cables, a harp. The bridge shall vault not only East River but also a continent, two seas, Europe and Cathay, the West and the East, matter and spirit.

The fault of the symbol is fairly obvious: it is too mechanical and will not take the whole weight of dense meaning put upon it. Crane early recognized this. A considerable time before its completion, Crane wrote to friends that he was finding the theme and project more and more absurd. Yet he determined to finish it, largely out of honor and out of the debt he felt to Otto Kahn for the money Kahn had given him for completion of the work. He determined to make it a brilliant, a great, failure, and this he did.

The extent of the success and of the failure will take considerably more examination. Still greatly to be admired, I think, are the verbal ability and also the tentative insights provided by the last section, although that section, upon which the final thrusts of the poem depends, is largely a failure and even works, as Brom Weber has indicated, at cross-purposes to the original idea of the poem. Of this final section "Atlantis," from "O Thou steeled Cognizance" to the end of the poem, I can only assert that even Eliot and Pound cannot write so well without a subject.

Another much-quoted section is "The Tunnel," in which the dread of modern life is reported so well; but it remains essentially brilliant reporting, unless one take the attitude presented by Brewster Ghiselin that, under a Freudian interpretation of Crane,

the tunnel is Crane's mistaken but self-imposed psychological need to degrade himself and then a failure to face the degradation. Tate's comment seems to me extremely pertinent: the "Cape Hatteras" section uses the airplane as symbol of man's growth and spiritual development, but in "The Tunnel" section the subway is used for the opposite symbol. Tate wonders why the two can't be interchanged; the mechanical nature of the symbols and their impressionistic character are thus quite clear.

It is my impression that the other sections of *The Bridge* are not so generally known and anthologized as "The Tunnel" and parts of "Atlantis." However, there is much great poetry in several of them, too much to be noted in detail here. "Proem" is certainly important language, and I would agree fully with others that "The River" section has, at its close, the finest poetry in *The Bridge* and some of the best Crane ever wrote.

In the much belabored passage called "The Dance" Winters and others have paused to note that in a decisive moment, when Crane would establish in the verse the mystical union with Pocahontas as also a union with the American earth, he says, "Lie to us,—dance us back the tribal morn!" It is worth remarking, because here we have another evidence of Crane's thinking similar to that of many of his fellow-writers. As in much of D. H. Lawrence, and as in such Eliot lines as "I should have been a pair of ragged claws scuttling across the floors of silent seas," this line is an indication of the death-wish, the wish, at least, to give up consciousness to the unconscious life.

Tate has remarked that the ideas Crane held asked of nature that it have perfection, and that they asked of the poet that he have intensity. This is a wise insight. Crane certainly had intensity, most among the writers of our time; nature was probably imperfect. Crane lived certain theories fully and, in a sense, rode them to his own destruction. Out of the intensity of experience and of language he left some very brilliant fragments and a few full passages of great poetry. It is idle to speculate what he would have been like—what he would have done—with other ideas; I believe he recognized as well as anyone that they were the source of what accomplishment he had attained and also that they were destroying him. We have left the contemplation

of the life and of the poetry, so spectacularly full of pain and bitterness, once for Crane and always for the onlooker. I hope that this essay will help the onlooker to a feeling of a double-edged tragedy in the pain. It is the feeling with which I would read that much remarked and very great line with which I close; Crane knew, I believe, that the arrows were shot by others but also by himself, and that they were not merely physical. The line is

> I could not pick the arrows from my side.

The Integrity of T. S. Eliot*

DUDLEY WYNN

I think it is not inaccurate to say that the Nobel Prize in Literature (awarded to T. S. Eliot in 1948) does not necessarily distinguish between merit and reputation. On the whole, an author who has done good work over a long period of time and who has had consistently for some years the respectful attention of his generation, may reasonably expect some such public notice of his achievement. It is at least notice of his representativeness for our time. This is no guarantee, of course, of his

*Quotations from the work of T. S. Eliot used in this essay are reprinted by permission of Mr. Eliot's publisher, Harcourt, Brace and Co., Inc. Selections from *Ash Wednesday* and "The Hippopotamus" are quoted from *Collected Poems 1909-1935* by T. S. Eliot, copyright, 1936, by Harcourt, Brace and Co., Inc. All prose selections are from *Selected Essays 1917-1932* by T. S. Eliot, copyright, 1932, by Harcourt, Brace and Co., Inc. The other selections are quoted, as indicated in the text, from the following: *Four Quartets,* copyright, 1943, by T. S. Eliot, reprinted by permission of Harcourt, Brace and Co., Inc.; *The Rock* by T. S. Eliot, copyright, 1934, by Harcourt, Brace and Co., Inc.; *Murder in the Cathedral* by T. S. Eliot, copyright, 1935, by Harcourt, Brace and Co., Inc.; *The Family Reunion,* copyright, 1939, by T. S. Eliot, reprinted by permission of Harcourt, Brace and Co., Inc.

permanent worth or of his strictly literary merit; but the award is perhaps a *rough* indicator of a man's centrality in his time. We have something of a right and a duty, then, to make a re-appraisal of Mr. Eliot as we see him now, and without any illusion that we are speaking for posterity or *sub specie aeternitatis.*

T. S. Eliot has had about thirty years in the public eye, now, as poet and critic. He has published wisely, carefully. It is a comparatively sparse production, not a prolific one. His career begins to look like a carefully devised and plotted one. On its creative side, we can list the *Prufrock* volume (1917), the *Poems* (1920), *The Waste Land* (1922), *The Hollow Men* (1925); we can say, with reasonable justice, that from 1917 through 1925, Eliot was exploring the blind alley that nineteenth- and twentieth-century civilization had got into—not its decadence so much as its sterility. Then a turning point comes in *Ash Wednesday* (1930):

> Because I cannot hope to turn again
> Consequently I rejoice, having to construct something
> Upon which to rejoice—

an attitude not too far from that of William Butler Yeats in "The Tower":

> Now shall I make my soul,
> Compelling it to study
> In a learned school. . . .

Then come three plays behind which the dogmas of Christianity stand, *The Rock, Murder in the Cathedral* (1935), and *The Family Reunion* (1939). *Four Quartets,* of which at least the first, "Burnt Norton," had been completed by 1935, were published as a unit together in 1943, in which the search of the soul for its *integrity,* for the full and honest *realization* of timelessness, is carried as far perhaps as it can be carried in our time. It is, in a sense, a neat pattern: a witty poet probing his age's spiritual drought, relying mainly upon certain devices learned from the Symbolists of France and the English metaphysicals; then the well-dramatized announcement that he is going to construct something upon which to rejoice; and then the third block

of his work, the quite definite *constructing* of that something upon which to rejoice.

This is, of course, a tremendous over-simplification, as any consideration of Eliot's critical writing and its dates will immediately show. In the creative work we have just put the dividing line at *Ash Wednesday* (1930). The essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" goes all the way back to 1917. Using hindsight upon it, we can see that it clearly announces the great shift in values that Eliot is to work at. His explicit announcement of his stand for "Royalism in politics, Classicism in literature, and Anglo-Catholicism in religion," came in 1928. The drift is obvious in the prose (and also in the poetry) long before that.

The neat pattern we have laid out was not neat and not clear in the years between 1917 and about 1935. Paul Elmer More in a now famous review of Eliot's *Selected Essays* in 1932 was extremely puzzled by what he felt was the unbridged gap between the humanism of Eliot, underpinned with religion and with a clear and bold attack upon the whole romantic and naturalistic outlook, on the one hand, and the way, on the other hand, in which Eliot gave complete loose to "that inexhaustible discontent, languor, and homesickness . . . the chords of which ring all through our modern literature." (The quoted phrase is not More's and not Eliot's, but Walter Pater's on Coleridge, quoted by Eliot in the essay "Arnold and Pater."[1]) To quote Paul Elmer More's specific words:

> It is not that we have to do with an author who is strong in one phase of his work and weak in another, but that this power is so differently directed here and there. The writer of the "Waste Land" and the other poems of that period appeals to us as one struck to the heart by the confusion and purposelessness and wastefulness of the world about him, and as dismayed by the impoverishment of our human emotions and imagination in a life so divested of meaning and so dull of conscience. And to that world his verse will be held up as a ruthlessly faithful mirror. . . . If there be any salvation from such a whirligig of chance and time it is only into the peace of utter escape—*"Shantih, shantih!"*
>
> And now against this lyric prophet of chaos must be set

[1]T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays 1917-1932* (New York, 1932), p. 353.

> the critic who will judge the world from the creed of the classicist, the royalist, and the Anglo-Catholic, who will see behind the clouds of illusion the steady decrees of a divine purpose, and who has gone so far at least in that program as to compose a long pamphlet . . . of "Thoughts After Lambeth." And what has the young rebel who rejoices in the disillusion of the "Waste Land" to do with the Bishops of the Church assembled in solemn conclave to unravel the purposes of Deity? In one sense it would be easy to reconcile such a *volte face* by saying simply that the author has undergone a deep conversion; and that explanation is in a way true. But the embarrassing fact remains that somehow the poet contrives to carry on the old shop into the new market. I think, for instance, that a sensitive mind cannot read "Ash Wednesday" without an uneasy perception of something fundamentally amiss in employing for an experience born of Anglo-Catholic faith a metrical form and a freakishness of punctuation suitable for the presentation of life regarded as without form and void. . . .
>
> No, it is not the revolution in Mr. Eliot's views of life, his conversion if you prefer the word, that troubles his true admirers, but the fact that his change on one side is complicated and disrupted by lack of change on the other side.[2]

More, extreme conservative, was disturbed that the poetry was not Classical and Humanist and religious, as the prose was, or rather, that the man who had announced himself intellectually a thorough traditionalist, was so utterly untraditional in verse form and technique. More notes elsewhere in his review, with some glee, I think, that all leftists (literary and political) are disturbed for the reverse reasons: the stand taken by Eliot in his criticism makes the marvelous *modern* quality of the poetry seem less wonderful than it might otherwise be.

Mr. Yvor Winters, too, in *Anatomy of Nonsense* saw the cleavage.

> T. S. Eliot is probably the most widely respected literary figure of our time; he is known primarily as the leader of the intellectual reaction against the romanticism of which he began his career as a disciple. It is my purpose to show

[2]Paul Elmer More, [review of *Selected Essays 1917-1932*, by T. S. Eliot], *Saturday Review of Literature*, 1932; quoted from Leonard Unger, editor, *T. S. Eliot: A Selected Critique* (New York, 1948), pp. 27-28.

> that his intellectualism and his reactionary position are alike an illusion. It is perhaps needless to say that I use the word *reactionary* in no emotional or pejorative sense, but in a simple and literal one; I regard myself as a reactionary.[3]

Winters attacks Eliot's view of "autotelic art," a sheer naturalistic automatism that is anathema to the Classicist and Humanist. Winters shows that these views of Eliot's betray themselves in essays in which Eliot purports to defend tradition, control, and a reactionary (non-progressive) view of the world. Likewise with the "theory of the objective correlative" that Eliot had set forth in his essay on "Hamlet." Eliot wrote:

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula for that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.[4]

Winters says:

> Now finding an "objective correlative" for an emotion is not the same thing as understanding it: to understand it we must know and correctly judge its motive.

Winters proceeds to Eliot's comparison of Lancelot Andrewes and Donne, and says:

> Now it is immaterial with respect to my present purposes whether this comparison of the two men is a just one; the point which interests me is this: that Andrewes is praised because he adheres to my principles, whereas Donne is blamed because he adheres to those of Eliot. Eliot does not explain his self-contradiction, nor does he give any evidence that he is aware of it.

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[3]Yvor Winters, "T. S. Eliot or The Illusion of Reaction," *The Anatomy of Nonsense* [part of *In Defense of Reason* (New York, 1947), p. 460; original edition of *The Anatomy of Nonsense,* Norfolk, Conn., 1943.] All subsequent quotations from Yvor Winters in this paper are from succeeding pages of the same essay.

[4]Eliot, *Selected Essays,* pp. 124-25.

Winters finds further that the "primacy which Eliot gives to the emotions leads directly to a thorough determinism of the most dangerous sort: if we are bound to express our emotions without understanding them, we obviously have no way of judging or controlling them, but must take them as they come." Winters, again, will have nothing to do with Eliot's easy assumption that "belief" is no problem in poetry. Winters does not deny that he himself, being strictly anti-hedonist, can enjoy, for example, Wallace Stevens' "Sunday Morning," or that he himself (Winters), while not a medieval Catholic, can still understand and enjoy *The Divine Comedy*—up to a point. In the last analysis, though, Winters says, the "thought of a poem must be in some sense acceptable; the thought of the poem is of the greatest importance as part of the poem itself." The general drift of Eliot's romantic, autotelic theory, according to Winters, does not permit Eliot to admit this. There is not space even to survey the remainder of Winters' strictures upon Eliot—upon the gap between Eliot's professed Christianity, reactionism (in the good sense), insistence upon the importance of dogma, on the one hand, and Eliot's automatism, determinism, and generally individualistic romanticism on the other hand.

To summarize briefly, then, here is what we have in the attitudes of criticism at about the time Eliot announced his stand for Royalism, Classicism, and Anglo-Catholicism. The liberal mind felt that the poetry was promising, the criticism hopelessly reactionary; Paul Elmer More thought the poetry romantic and undisciplined, the criticism promising; and Yvor Winters thought that both the poetry and the criticism in actuality betrayed the naturalistic error, despite all Eliot's assertions that he was moving towards Classicism and the acceptance of a framework of basic Christian dogma that could rehabilitate modern man. The least we can say, I believe, is that Eliot has long been a focus of attention for our time. If he does not point the Humanistic and religious answer for our time, then perhaps nobody does. Some of the inconsistencies that have bothered the critics will be returned to later.

And I do believe that by continuing our over-simplification we can find a wholeness and an integrity in Eliot's work which

his critics of a few years ago could not find. A great deal of commentary is now in. Sheer bafflement and annoyance have given way to a fairly good understanding of what Eliot had to say and how he went at the problem of saying it. We do not deserve much credit today for being able to see a certain integrity or wholeness where critics of ten years ago saw so much inconsistency. What I have to say is neither new nor original; it is only a slight reshifting of emphasis.

Eliot's integrity, I believe, lies in this simple fact: that from the very beginning he was a Humanist who was aware of the inadequacy of the Humanist solution, and that he has consistently and deliberately moved, with much honesty and with seldom any ideological forcing, from the original Humanist position to the religious position; all along he has been aware of the tremendous difficulty of what he was attempting. Besides, he has kept his main energies for the creative side of the effort, not for the hortatory or ideological or forensic side.

From *Ash Wednesday* on, Eliot has an abiding concept in the translatable content of his work: the achievement of Christian humility, the entering upon a purgation of soul. The concept is put in different ways, it is re-orchestrated in different poems, familiar symbolic *motifs,* as in music, are woven in and out. Two basic sources enable the commentator to find his way through the entire creative production of Eliot from *Ash Wednesday* on: Dante's *Divine Comedy* and two works by the Spanish mystic, St. John of the Cross, entitled *The Dark Night of the Soul* and *The Ascent of Mount Carmel.* These outline the steps by which one arrives at the Christian mystical experience—an important characteristic of which is the sense of being out of time, past and future all contained in the present; the sense of having all desire stilled and of one's being suffused in God's love. But the way there is hard. The first step is passive, to remain still. Then agony, the agony of being without hope, then the purgatorial ascent up the ladder with ten rounds or the stair with ten steps. On the way, at every stair or landing, desire rekindles, hope and despair rekindle and have to be put aside. Sensual diversions intervene, but can be overcome as the hard ascent is achieved.

Now, this whole idea of the necessity of humility and of a

purgatorial experience is done ritualistically in *Ash Wednesday* and in more definitely secular terms in *Four Quartets.* The ideas are very simple and very persistent: sit still, care and not care, climb the purgatorial stairway, die to the world to achieve spiritual understanding. Finally, in *Four Quartets* we are allowed a glimpse of the mystic's rewards: perception of timelessness, where past and future are all *present;* perception of the stillness at the center of all motion. It is practically all pure Dante or St. John of the Cross.

My interpretations here owe practically everything to Leonard Unger's essay "Ash Wednesday" and James Johnson Sweeney's essay "East Coker."[5]

> Because I do not hope to turn again
> Because I do not hope
> Because I do not hope to turn

"Turning" here is St. John of the Cross's "sterile secular motion." "The aged eagle" of line 5 of *Ash Wednesday* is the world-weary old man of St. John's *Dark Night.* "The infirm glory of the positive hour" (l. 10) is worldly relief, and "The one veritable transitory power" (l. 13) is spiritual relief, both mentioned by St. John and both, at this stage of the purgatorial ascent, renounced by the poet. "The voice" that is renounced in line 22 is the voice of any spiritual master. In St. John the penitent soul must go it alone; there can be no consolation or support in any instruction. Recognition of the necessity of "having to construct something upon which to rejoice" is the initial misery of the *Dark Night.*

> Because these wings are no longer wings to fly
> But merely vans to beat the air
> The air which is now thoroughly small and dry
> Smaller and dryer than the will
> Teach us to care and not to care
> Teach us to sit still.

In connection with this passage, Unger quotes the following from

[5]Both in Leonard Unger, editor, *T. S. Eliot: A Selected Critique* (New York, 1948), pp. 349-394 and pp. 395-414.

St. John's *Dark Night,* the likeness of which to Eliot's lines is apparent: "To this end God is pleased to strip them of this old man . . . leaving the understanding dark, the will dry, the memory empty. . . ."[6] In Section III of *Ash Wednesday* Dante's purgatorial stairway and St. John's "ladder of living faith" with ten steps supply the major imagery. The conception of the devil, of hope and despair as earthly emotions and devil's work, and the reminiscences upon the sensual diversions which distract the soul in its ascent—all are, as Unger shows, out of *Dark Night of the Soul.* In Section VI with the change from

> *Because* I do not hope to turn again

to

> *Although* I do not hope to turn again

there is evidence that the purpose has been achieved. Purgation is working. The "wide window" of line 8 of Section VI, which opens upon the old worldly life, is a conception out of St. John of the Cross; "dying" and "birth" of line 20 are the familiar dying to earth and birth into the spiritual life, common in mystical literature. "The place of solitude where three dreams cross" (l. 21) introduces an idea as old as Eliot's earliest critical writing; the "three dreams" are past, present, and future, all are dreams when measured against eternity, and each of the three is in all the others. It is not fantastic to see this idea in the famous "Tradition and the Individual Talent"; it certainly becomes an important theme in *Four Quartets;* and, most important, it is a familiar concept in the writings of the Christian mystics.

Turning to *Four Quartets,* we find the opening lines of "Burnt Norton," first division of that work, to be as follows:

> Time present and time past
> Are both perhaps present in time future,
> And time future contained in time past.
> If all time is eternally present
> All time is unredeemable.

Such ideas as this, however, set into a ritualistic mold in *Ash Wednesday,* are here in a secular and more generalized mold.

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[6]*Ibid,* pp. 355-56.

"Burnt Norton" nevertheless keeps the two main concepts of *Ash Wednesday* always to the fore: the attempt to reach timelessness and the attempt to reach stillness. "East Coker" emphasizes the futility of life lived without a concept of eternity, also the wisdom of humility, the darkness one must descend into to find the light, the still center one must penetrate to if he is to find the meaning of motion and dancing.

So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing. Section IV of "East Coker," with its hospital imagery, owes almost everything to St. John of the Cross's image of purgation as a hospital, as Sweeney has abundantly demonstrated. "The Dry Salvages," third main division of *Four Quartets,* links with *Ash Wednesday* in its resumption of the image of the river and of the sea, with "river" meaning time or history, "sea" meaning timelessness or eternity, and both perhaps meaning also some non-Christian concept of fertility spiritualized. The specifically Christian mystical theme comes out again in Section V:

> But to apprehend
> The point of intersection of the timeless
> With time, is an occupation for the saint—
> No occupation either, but something given
> And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
> Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.

"Little Gidding," last main division of *Four Quartets,* draws to a head all the symbolism and imagery that Eliot had been using since *Ash Wednesday.* The core is still some very obvious ideas from Christian mysticism. Dying to earthly life to gain spiritual life is important, and thought and imagery come together in the concept of purgatorial fire and its ecstasy being one with the ecstasy of blessed experience in the rose garden of earth.

> Quick now, here, now, always—
> A condition of complete simplicity
> (Costing not less than everything)
> And all shall be well and
> All manner of thing shall be well
> When the tongues of flame are in-folded
> Into the crowned knot of fire
> And the fire and the rose are one.

Eliot's search for religious integrity is, as I ventured to say before, the translatable content of everything he wrote in poetry or drama from 1930 on. Let us turn to the plays to see how the search is worked out. *The Rock,* a pageant, is, in my opinion, a failure. It is almost completely hortatory—at least the choruses are. Against the background of depression and unemployment, the choruses say that the world is going to the dogs because the True Church is being neglected. Eliot has always meant just this, but everywhere else he says it in terms of some personal search for inner control. In these choruses for *The Rock* it is implied that a Sunday morning's change of heart might lead to the *action* that would restore religious values. The theme of the third of the choruses, for example (*Collected Poems,* p. 189), is that men alternate "between futile speculation and unconsidered action."

> Many are engaged in writing books and printing them,
> Many desire to see their names in print,
> Many read nothing but the race reports.
> Much is your reading, but not the Word of GOD,
> Much is your building, but not the House of GOD.
> Will you build me a house of plaster, with
> corrugated roofing,
> To be filled with a litter of Sunday newspapers?

The choruses are, indeed, a rather pleasant jeremiad against the secularization of life. Consider this one (*Collected Poems,* p. 192):

> O weariness of men who turn from GOD
> . . .
> To schemes of human greatness thoroughly discredited,
> Binding the earth and the water to your service,
> . . .
> Engaged in devising the perfect refrigerator,
> Engaged in working out a rational morality,
> . . .
> Though you forget the way to the Temple,
> There is one who remembers the way to your door:
> Life you may evade, but Death you shall not.
> You shall not deny the Stranger.

Murder in the Cathedral is successful where *The Rock* is not. It is not hortatory but dramatic. Of course, it is drama with a purpose, namely, to establish the necessity of modern man's redemption. Martyr's blood is added. The murderers apologize in best liberal, pragmatic fashion; Becket, after rejecting the Fourth Tempter, succeeds in convincing at least himself that he is to sacrifice himself not because of the worldly desire for honor but because of a desire that lies in the realm of the timeless:

> You argue by results, as this world does,
> To settle if an act be good or bad.
> You refer to the fact. For every life and every act
> Consequence of good and evil can be shown.
> And as in time results of many deeds are blended
> So good and evil in the end become confounded.
> It is not in time that my death shall be known;
> It is out of time that my decision is taken
> If you call that decision
> To which my whole being gives entire consent.
> I give my life
> To the Law of God above the Law of Man.
> Those who do not the same
> How should they know what I do?
> How should you know what I do? Yet how much more
> Should you know than these madmen beating on the door.
>
> *Murder in the Cathedral,* p. 72.

Murder in the Cathedral sets forth an important idea of the *Four Quartets* concerning the point at which the wheel turns and is also still:

> Peace. And let them be, in their exaltation.
> They speak better than they know, and beyond your
> understanding.
> They know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer.
> They know and do not know, that acting is suffering
> And suffering is action. Neither does the actor suffer
> Nor the patient act. But both are fixed
> In an eternal action, an eternal patience
> To which all must consent that it may be willed
> And which all must suffer that they may will it,
> That the pattern may subsist, for the pattern is the action

And the suffering, that the wheel may turn and still
Be forever still.

Murder in the Cathedral, p. 21.

In the play, as in *Four Quartets,* there is the same complaint about the inadequacies of raw experience to the attainment of wisdom:

We do not know very much of the future
Except that from generation to generation
The same things happen again and again.
Men learn little from others' experience.
But in the life of one man, never
The same time returns. Sever
The cord, shed the scale. Only
The fool, fixed in his folly, may think
He can turn the wheel on which he turns.

Murder in the Cathedral, p. 24.

Eliot has shifted point of view, so to speak, but has not changed any basic ideas. Instead of the intensely personal search for salvation we have here the spectacle of martyrdom flashed before the eyes of persons (even persons within the play) who do not understand redemption or the need of integrity. At the same time that Eliot dramatizes Becket's martyrdom he also dramatizes the lack of appeal that Becket's and Eliot's ideas have in the corrupted world.

The Family Reunion, the next play to be considered, is obviously another of those places where Eliot, having treated his subject within a religious framework, moves the subject over with little change to treat it in a secular framework. *Ash Wednesday* was within the ritualistic pattern, furthering the concept of humility — purgatorial experience — possible redemption. *Four Quartets* makes use of the same subject, the same materials, but in a secular, lyrical, philosophical framework. Likewise, in *The Family Reunion* the materials of *Murder in the Cathedral* are moved over into a secular framework. The concept is still that of the necessity of man's accepting grace—or that the trouble in a man's life (Harry's) is not the result of a specific sin which he has committed but is the result of Original Sin, generations of

Sin, with a curse existing now upon Harry and the family. As in the case of Becket's martyrdom, hardly anyone understands Harry's willingness to surrender to the Eumenides, to make expiation of the curse. Leonard Unger puts the problem in these terms:

> As the play develops it becomes more and more apparent that Harry's problem is not whether or not he murdered his wife, a moral problem, but a spiritual problem of longer standing to which the murder is only incidental. And this is what Harry finally discovers for himself. He is beset by a peculiar need, one which his family and the world do not understand. This need is the "experience," the advance toward spiritual rebirth and the peace of religious love—variously represented throughout Eliot's poetry and described in *Burnt Norton* as the "inner freedom from the practical desire."[7]

As in *Murder in the Cathedral* and the *Quartets* there are the to-be-expected reflections upon time (or that mystical point where three times cross: past, future, and present), upon the inadequacy of experience to wisdom, upon man's desperate blindness in evading truth. Early in the play Agatha says:

> Thus with most careful devotion
> Thus with precise attention
> To detail, interfering preparation
> Of that which is already prepared
> Men tighten the knot of confusion
> Into perfect misunderstanding,
> Reflecting a pocket-torch of observation
> Upon each other's opacity
> Neglecting all the admonitions
> From the world around the corner
> The wind's talk in the dry holly-tree
> The inclination of the moon
> The attraction of the dark passage
> The paw under the door.
>
> *The Family Reunion,* p. 21.

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[7]Unger, ed., *T. S. Eliot: A Selected Critique,* p. 386.

Harry says:

> But how can I explain, how can I explain to *you?*
> You will understand less after I have explained it.
> All that I could hope to make you understand
> Is only events: not what has happened.
> And people to whom nothing has ever happened
> Cannot understand the unimportance of events.
>
> *The Family Reunion,* p. 27.

Harry again exclaims in one place:

> O God, man, the things that are going to happen
> Have already happened.
>
> *The Family Reunion,* p. 72.

When Harry and Agatha, the only two people in the play who see what their author wants people to see, are accused of fleeing from reality, Agatha replies:

> In a world of fugitives
> The person taking the opposite direction
> Will appear to run away.
>
> *The Family Reunion,* p. 110.

In all the treatment of humility, purgatory or expiation, and beatific identification with "pure being" there crops up frequently a notion that Eliot gained early in his career, namely, that mankind has been off the track since the Renaissance or since the end of the middle ages. The idea is very important in "East Coker," in *Murder in the Cathedral,* in *The Family Reunion,* and in much of Eliot's prose. David Daiches in *Poetry and the Modern World* attributes the idea to T. E. Hulme, from whom Daiches thinks Eliot got it.

> I do think that there is a certain general state of mind which has lasted from the Renaissance till now, with what is, in reality, very little variation. . . . It is perhaps enough to say that, taking at first the form of the "humanities," it

> has in its degeneracy taken the form of a belief in "Progress" and the rest of it. It was in its way a fairly consistent system, but it is probably at the moment breaking up. . . . I feel, myself, a repugnance towards the *Weltanschauung* (as distinct from the technical part) of all philosophy since the Renaissance. In comparison with what I can vaguely call the religious attitude, it seems to me to be trivial.[8]

Eliot himself says, as Daiches reminds us:

> I wish to distinguish sharply . . . between what seems to me the correct and *necessarily* vague Humanism, and what T. E. Hulme means by Humanism in his notes in *Speculations*. I agree with what Hulme says; and I am afraid that many modern Humanists are explicitly or implicitly committed to the view which Hulme denounces; and that they are, in consequence, men of the Renaissance rather than men of our own time. For instance, Hulme gives as one characteristic of the Humanist (in his sense) the "refusal to believe any longer in the radical imperfection of either Man or Nature." I cannot help feeling that Mr. Foerster and even Mr. Babbitt are nearer to the view of Rousseau than they are to the religious view. . . . It is to the immense credit of Hulme that he found out for himself that there is an *absolute* to which Man can *never* attain.[9]

Very specifically, these ideas come into "East Coker," the second of the *Four Quartets*. "In my beginning is my end." Eliot's ancestor, Sir Thomas Elyot, a Renaissance man with high hopes for mankind, was wrong. Eliot has to go back to where his ancestor began. "In my end is my beginning." Modern civilization having come to its futile end, we begin where we end, begin now, to search for the point outside time, the point at the very center of the wheel, which is the only point from which we can judge history or judge where mankind ought to try to go.

With this idea of Eliot's that the Renaissance is the seat of our troubles, one can easily divide Eliot's sheep from Eliot's goats. Dante is great. Shakespeare, although as great a poet as

[8]T. E. Hulme, "Mr. Epstein and the Critics," *New Age*, Dec. 25, 1913. Quoted in David Daiches, *Poetry and the Modern World* (Chicago, 1940), p. 92.

[9]Eliot, *Selected Essays 1917-1932*, p. 401.

ever lived, lacks Dante's all-embracing power. Shakespeare had no philosophy. Goethe is filled with the great fallacy of modern times, belief in Progress and belief in man. Irving Babbitt is pathetic in his desire to lift man, by Humanism, out of the naturalistic slough, for Humanism itself is really in the slough, the slough of history, in time, and not timeless. Matthew Arnold was pathetically wrong in thinking poetry and Culture could substitute for religion.

There is not time to show how this animus against the Renaissance and Humanism and the decision to seek religion and humility was forming in all of Eliot's creative work before *Ash Wednesday* as well as from *Ash Wednesday* on. The best evidence of it is in the carry-over of certain symbols in *Four Quartets.* The rose-garden, the rain to break the drouth, the ineffable childhood experience of ravishing love which Eliot carries through so much of the poetry—are nearly all present as early as the Sweeney poems. A line from "The Hippopotamus" (1920) is echoed in *Four Quartets* (1943):

> Although he seems so firm to us
> He is merely flesh and blood.
>
> Flesh and blood is weak and frail,
> Susceptible to nervous shock;

and

> In spite of which we like to think
> That we are sound, substantial flesh and blood—

A sentence from "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is turned into a basic concept of *Four Quartets.* The stretch of time here is 1917 to 1943. The sentence is:

> It [tradition] cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to any one who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but

> with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional.[10]

The idea in *Four Quartets* and in *The Family Reunion* and in *Murder in the Cathedral,* with emphasis only slightly shifted to fit the needs of each work, is that you can't be on the turning wheel and judge the wheel; you can't be in the temporal flux and judge time; and that past is present and the present is past. Now, since Mr. Eliot has been judging his time pretty harshly and pretty consistently from the beginning of his career, I think he thinks he has been at the still point of the turning wheel all along.

Now, to go back to the critics who were bewildered. Mr. Paul Elmer More, we remember, did not like the inconsistency between the formless, chaotic poetry and the doctrines of order, restraint, humility, and the necessity of Christian dogma that Eliot professed to believe in. Mr. Yvor Winters thought the poetry and the criticism were infected with the modern diseases of romanticism, cultural individualism, art as self-expression, art as autotelic, naturalistic despair, surrender of intellect to emotion, and other ills. I believe More and Winters are both right in sensing a kind of disparity and inconsistency; but I believe the disparity can be explained. Perhaps Eliot thought of himself, intellectually at least, as the St. Augustine of the twentieth century. He resolved upon a kind of sainthood for himself early in his career; but he quite deliberately decided that if the Augustinian type of sainthood in his maturity was to be convincing, then early in life he ought to sow some intellectual and artistic wild oats. Out of the world into eternity does not impress worldlings very much unless you start as the most worldly. If all this sounds slightly facetious, perhaps we can state it better in these terms: the feeling for the need for eternal values can arise in a man of Eliot's heritage, education, and religious back-

[10]Eliot, *Selected Essays 1917-1932,* p. 4.

ground only after he has made *real* to himself the vacuity of the world he is born into. Or better still, perhaps we should say that if a poet's career is to be established upon a pattern of his emergence from naturalistic despair to religious conviction, then the whole pattern will be sounder if the first phase, despair, is dramatized objectively instead of being *judged* from the beginning by the criteria of religion-Humanism, since it is the arriving at these very criteria themselves that constitutes the great theme of Eliot's poetic career. Therefore, even if Mr. Eliot started, as I think he probably did, with a conviction that naturalism will not do and even that Humanism will not do, he was perhaps wise in the first phase of his career as poet to give his feelings dramatically and not to pre-judge those feelings by intellectual criteria which he himself had already developed, as his prose shows—and to the bewilderment of some of his critics.

For in two major points in his criticism Eliot seems to remain consistent:

> 1. Poetry, all art, is *not* religion. Poetry is *in* history, in the world, in the flux—and therefore any man's poetry will reflect his age, is determined by the age, is better poetry for being so.

Mr. Winters believes in an abstract intelligence and taste of universal validity and wishes that Eliot had made use of it. Eliot has chosen instead to submerge himself dramatically in a point of view that gives complete expression to naturalistic despair or to the desire to get out of it. Since the argument is one of taste and method, not of philosophy, it probably cannot be settled.

> 2. A Christian society, the Christian dispensation does *not* bring perfection on earth. It merely holds the idea of perfection before individuals.

The Christian poet in a Christian society, then, is not a fine gentleman of absolutely correct demeanor like Mr. Paul Elmer More; he is more likely to be Villon, or the tortured Donne, or the lurid Baudelaire. He will perceive things in the imagery and the idiom of his time. No amount of Humanistic propriety or of abstract, intellectualized critical taste can restrain him. He has

got to digest the "young man carbuncular" and the "typist home at teatime."

One other problem needs mentioning: that of *poetry and belief.* How much of a blockage to Eliot's poetry is there for the reader who simply feels no need of humility, of purgation, of abiding at the still point of the turning wheel? I dare say the majority of Eliot's readers are still unconvinced of Eliot's basic conviction: that the world has been off the track for about four centuries—since the Renaissance. They can enjoy the poetry without accepting the belief, of course; but there's a limit to this, and certainly a limit to the amount of *effort* people will put into an attempt to get a full realization of beliefs which they do not feel any need of getting. Eliot knew this, of course, but he staked everything on the concept of the necessity of humility, of purgation, of abiding at the still point of the turning wheel. That is his integrity. And while this integrity has intensified his work, it has surely narrowed his range and his appeal.

Dos Passos and the Thirty Thousand Souls

VINCENT McHUGH

The business of the novelist begins, like a child, with seeing and hearing and tasting and smelling and touching, with the sense of movement and the consciousness of being. Proust remarks somewhere in *Le Temps retrouvé* that "the impression is to the writer what experimentation is to the scientist, with this difference, however, that for the scientist the labor of the intellect precedes and for the artist it comes after." More than that, we might say that the region of the perceptual and the affective is the artist's country. At the beginning, the middle and the end of his work he moves within its borders. Everything else—concepts, data, statistics, measurements, techniques—must be folded in as sugar and eggs and spice are folded into a cake. The whole process, from impression to imagination to formulation to execution, takes place in seeing terms and hearing terms and feeling terms, in terms of motion and the flow of the living consciousness. The intellect becomes, as it were, merely an advisory uncle.

Thus the good novelist is, first of all, an acute and accomplished sensibility. To a great extent the value of his work will depend on his ability to keep that sensibility fresh and alive—both

projective, as a beam of light is projected, and receptive, as a plant is receptive to light. He will develop a sensibility that can be *trusted,* if I may use the term, more or less as a geologist may trust his judgment of rock or the height of mountains above a plain. The novelist's sensibility grows in much the same terms and may test itself in much the same way. It is subject to the continual accretion and correction of experience. It adjusts its balance in a thousand little orderings of movement, like a tight-rope walker or a swimmer. And since this sensibility, or kind of sensibility, should perhaps be regarded as the focus of a novelist's equipment, we may use the term *sensibility* as a synecdoche, making it mean *all* the novelist's equipment: his senses, his imagination, his fund of memory, his unconscious, his emotional temperament, and even his intellect—in certain relations.

In dealing with John Dos Passos, a writer of very broad and complex sensibility, we are faced at once with the point that, though he has been endlessly reviewed, very little criticism has been written about him, and not much of that has been good by any standards. The reason is not hard to find. Dos Passos' work is threaded with references to the arts, and intimations of them; but he is not "literary." The critic who approaches Dos Passos is in Indian country. He has none, or few, of the traditional handles to grab. He must try to meet his subject on the level of the work itself: its variety of genres, its tremendous diversity of scenes and persons, and—in the novels, at least—its astonishing technical complexity. (For example, in some six or seven readings over the years, I have just begun to pick out the whole time-space scheme in *U. S. A.*: its simultaneities, its recapture of a scene through a second or third character's eyes, its backtracking and crisscrossing and interweaving in the whole vast narrative.) But Dos Passos' work makes another and even more drastic requirement. It is his habit, and his announced program, to work new ground. Thus the critic has almost no literary analogies to fall back on. He must be able to judge, in some measure, at least, the material itself, in all its breadth and multiplicity—and that very few of us are prepared to do.

In all, Dos Passos has published some twenty-three books. Two of these—*Three Plays* and *U. S. A.*—are combinations of earlier

books; and one, *Journeys Between Wars,* includes a rewriting of such work as *Rosinante to the Road Again,* a charmingly romantic young-man's book about Spain. The whole canon comprises eight novels—if we consider the trilogy *U. S. A.* as one—and includes a second trilogy published in separate volumes as *Adventures of a Young Man, Number One,* and *The Grand Design;* six works of social observation, if we count *Journeys Between Wars;* a book of historical ideas and personalities, *The Ground We Stand On;* three plays—*The Garbage Man* (originally produced as *The Moon Is A Gong*), *Airways, Inc.* and *Fortune Heights*—and a book of verse, *The Pushcart at The Curb.*

Taken one after another *en suite,* these books present an even more formidable body of accomplishment than they did singly, in the intervals of publication; and we can see that most of the significant questions about Dos Passos have not been asked, and even fewer answered. Is he merely a "topical" novelist? Or an "impressionist" novelist? Do his books date? If so, in what ways? What has been his main line of development as a writer? What are his dominant themes? What is the connection between his fiction and his nonfiction? Does he show any evolution in his political and social ideas? How much have his novels been compromised by the twist of the reformer?

These questions are relevant enough; but rather than try to answer them directly—they are all oversimplifications—I should like to chalk off two broad areas of inquiry. Necessarily broad, I think. Dos Passos' virtues as a writer are mainly the virtues of extension; and the critical school that sets out to examine a work with the painful particularity of a ringmaster in a flea circus would find very little to go on. I should like to consider (1) the relation of Dos Passos to American society, and thus by extension to world society; and (2) the chief characteristics of his work.

II

A letter from Roger Williams to the elder Winthrop, quoted by Dos Passos in *The Ground We Stand On,* might well serve as a motto for his own tangent to American society: " . . . I desire not to sleep in security and dream of a nest no hand can reach.

I cannot but expect changes and the change of that last enemy death, yet dare I not despise a liberty which the Lord seemeth to offer me, if for mine own or other's peace; and therefore have I been this bold to present my thoughts unto you. . . ."

We have all read Dos Passos' books, and we all have opinions about them. Perhaps far more often than in the case of other writers, these opinions concern the effect of actual life in his work. I mean that they are not, in the main, literary opinions. We talk about his characters, why they did this or that, and the scenes they move in. We talk about them almost as if they were a part of our own lives. We remember his people as if they were people we had known. This in itself is indicative. There is an immediate aliveness in his work, quite beyond the topical, that touches the aliveness in us; and the triumph here lies in the fact that this is precisely what he sets out to do.

Thus the problems in Dos Passos' work tend to seem easy—or, at least, easy in the sense of textural analysis—because they *are* somewhat resolved into the typical, because they seem to concern our own lives so nearly. But when we move in on the question of his effective relation to our society, we see that the problem is not so simple. We can pose that question best, in the large, by imagining what our conception of American life in the first half of the twentieth century would have been *without* Dos Passos.

The question, I think, has a startling effect. It seems to me that we might have had a quite different notion even of the lives we ourselves have led—but perhaps even more important, a different notion, or far less notion of any kind, as to the nature of the patterns in American society. That difference—the spread between our conception of the contemporary American world which includes Dos Passos' books, and our conception without them—makes a fairly accurate measure of his social importance in that respect. The spread, I think, is considerable.

He is, first of all, a major American novelist by every sign. One of these signs, though by no means a definitive one, is that his chief novels are focused on the core of American life—the pragmatic centers, the areas of power: government, labor, industry, finance, control in war, and the rest. He is thus not a Bohemian,

or a specialist, or a provincial. For the purposes of his fiction, he accepts the major given emphases and proportions of our society. A second sign is that he has tried to take in its whole extent, by direct treatment or suggestion.

We should note here that the novelist has no obligation to deal with major materials or the current social dominants. He may choose, with honor, to cultivate the unregarded chicory flower by the roadside or the crenations of his own navel. But I think a special honor must attach to the man who does what is perhaps the more difficult thing, the central thing. I can imagine no more overwhelmingly difficult job for a novelist than the attempt to catch the whole inchoate roar of American life during the first fifty years of our century.

But this kind of honor—and it belongs certainly to Dos Passos—must be literary first of all. Is the book good? Does it speak truly of the fate of living men? If not, the other questions do not matter. But if it does, I think it may also be deserving of some social honor. Granted that such honor must always be a by-product, almost an accident, in the performance of creation—and we have seen how this by-product, in Marxist hands, can be twisted to mean the whole thing—we must grant the valuable service a good and free artist renders, almost inadvertently, to his society. It seems to be a familiar idea by now, but I should like to point out again that art is the only agency in our society that shows us to each other in our living likeness—*shows us how we live, in the terms in which we live.* It may do that, to some extent, and still be bad art. The novels of J. P. Marquand or of Michael Gold, for quite different reasons, may provide cases in point. But the value of this service—which has somewhat the same function, for us, that the medicine man and the crier and the women's gossip had, let us say, in a homogeneous Kiowa village—that value should not be too lightly regarded. It is not the business of the artist merely to tell us about the people we do not know. Whom do we know, or not know, until he has given us his viewpoint to compare with ours? If he is a good artist, and a major one, he will show us how we *all* live—he will make us see it, and feel it, and undergo it, in terms of the ordered community of a work of art. Perhaps we don't always love a

friend who tells us the truth, or merely what he believes to be the truth, about ourselves and our friends, no matter how tactful he is. But if he has charm, and we have sense, we may keep him as a friend. In any case, if we are convinced that his motives are impersonal, we know that he has done us a service.

It would be true, I think, to say that Dos Passos knows more, and tells us more, about the enormously varied living habits of Americans in our time than any other novelist. It is fantastic to watch him move so surely through the patterns of milk-wagon drivers, public relations men, government officials, Florida promoters, interior decorators, movie producers, housewives, bindlestiffs, actors, socialite women, merchant seamen, Texas bankers, Harvard students, Kentucky miners, chorus girls, labor organizers, and a thousand others. Nor does his method usually produce what are known as types in literature. It seems clear that he sets the pattern first and then creates an actual character who will move authentically through it. This does, of course, somewhat limit the autonomy of the characters, and, like the textural treatment, tends to stylize them. It has been objected that his characters lack depth, but I think this is a misunderstanding, or at least an irrelevance, in terms of his purpose. The characters move, and are intended to move, in another dimension—in breadth. Dos Passos gives them an intense cultivation in time-space action, and this too seems the precisely right choice for a study of Americans in their own terms.

Almost without exception, these characters are activists, movers and shakers, get-up-and-go men. There isn't a Hamlet in the lot, unless young Jimmy Herf in *Manhattan Transfer* may be considered one. Even their dilemmas, their emotional blocks, their despairs, are more often than not characteristically the result of too much movement, or movement that did not produce the desired ends, or resulted in a check on further movement. This continual action—the pauses are usually covered in a sentence or two—is related at once to Dos Passos' own sense of life, to the demands of his kind of fiction, and to the American mores in general. We might argue, in fact, that American culture is predominantly kinesthetic and can be represented aptly only in

terms of movement. Thus Dos Passos' choice of treatment is remarkably appropriate on all counts.

The programmatic sense of action in Dos Passos is complemented by another distinctively American quality: the character of his vision. (It should perhaps be mentioned here that I use the term *American,* not as a hallmark of superiority, but purely as a cultural definition.) Like Henry James and E. E. Cummings (Has anyone remarked how much some of the Camera Eye passages in *U. S. A.* resemble Cummings' poetry?), Dos Passos has done some work as a painter—not very good work, to judge from the rather high-keyed illustrations in *Orient Express.* But the painter's way of seeing things is evident everywhere, especially in his early writings. Scene after scene in *Three Soldiers,* in its color sense, and in its sense of composition, resembles a picture by Seurat or Pierre Bonnard; and the champagne supper in *Manhattan Transfer* is a Toulouse-Lautrec to the life. Even in some of his later work, Dos Passos' method of building a scene out of an infinity of small touches is characteristically pointillist. There are literary recollections too, of course—Chrisfield looking for his outfit, in *Three Soldiers,* inevitably but rather obviously makes us think of the protagonist of *The Red Badge of Courage* and the glimpse of Waterloo in *La Chartreuse de Parme*—but the influences are still predominantly pictorial. In *Orient Express,* though we are reminded of Chateaubriand and are aware that Dos Passos must have read Doughty, we still feel that the intimations are closer to Matisse or to such a painter-writer as Gautier.

But little by little, though the painter's eye remains a strong factor in his work, the French and Spanish reminders, always secondary, begin to fade, and we note the gradual ascendancy of a distinctively American—perhaps *the* distinctively American—type of vision. Here we use the term *vision* in a double sense: as a way of seeing things, and as a way of regarding the world. What Marsden Hartley called "American definiteness," its key characteristic is an intense concentration on the object in itself, and the behavior of the object, divorced from the spectator. This kind of vision, in the higher degrees of intensity, may even, as it were, project itself *into* the object, causing that object to glow with an extreme clarity, or with the detachment of abstraction, or—as the

focus becomes too long—even with an effect of the mystical or pantheistic. Thus we may venture an arbitrary dualism and suggest that the objective is a male type of vision, as opposed to the female or subjective vision, which draws in and encloses the object seen. (Psychologically and culturally, the matter is a good deal more complex than that. It has long roots in the American past. But this simplification may serve for the moment.) So we may speak of the *seeing* first, then the *seeing into;* then what the seeing *means,* and how it can be transformed into literature.

This type of vision, which denotes a consonant inflection of sensibility out toward the external world, has deceived two or three generations of European and American critics, who condescendingly damned it as "naturalism." In any event, the term *naturalism*—or *realism,* as it is sometimes called: as if all reality were not "real"—had better be left to the philosophers and the literary historians. The term itself, or the kind of writing it connotes, has been attacked by status-quo moralists, esthetic formalists, social conservatives, and antimaterialists of one stripe or another. It has been defended by social reformers, apologists for the working class, free-speech liberals, and the true-to-life literary theorists. In the general hullabaloo, nearly everyone has lost sight of the essential misconception implicit in the term itself. As *naturalism* evolved, it became a typical confusion of categories, based on the notion that a fact—in the sense that an experimental scientist, or even a newspaper editor, understands that word—can function *as a fact* in literature. Employed as fact —that is, not as a formal or psychological device—it sets up a conflict between two kinds of belief: our willingness to grant, let us say, that a certain actual clock is verifiably on time when it strikes the hour, and our quite different conviction that the striking of a clock in a novel will, as the author has persuaded us, mean the death of a certain character. In fiction, all is fiction.

Moreover, Dos Passos' work hardly answers to the primary definition of naturalism comprised in the famous preface to the first edition of *Germinie Lacerteux,* published in 1864; and it has only a partial correspondence to the later documentation-plus-social exposure developed by Zola and Céard, among others. Certainly the element of social exposure, of criticism by implica-

tion, is present in much of Dos Passos' fiction. Revolution of one sort or another stands like a kind of available alternative through the 1,400-odd pages of *U. S. A.* But the social exposure is nearly always composed into the fiction—that is, it does not challenge or violate the autonomy of the work; and there is little or no documentation of the kind we have become accustomed to in Zola or Huysmans or Dreiser.

The morphology of the term *naturalism* may warn us that, though such imported words are valuable in fostering interchange among cultures, they cannot usually be equated from culture to culture. Torn out of their ethnical context, they have at best only an approximate descriptive usefulness; and they may compromise understanding quite as often as they foster it. I think this has been somewhat true in the case of Dos Passos. His intense objectivity of vision belongs in a tradition shared by many American painters and writers, especially those least influenced by European derivatives—in de Crevécoeur, in the fanciful exactness of William Bartram, in the abstracted clarity of Audubon's detail, in Whitman's observations of men working at their trades, in Marcy's account of a prairie-dog village, in Stephen Crane's short stories, and in the paintings of Mount and Catlin and Bingham and Homer and Hopper and Marin, among others. John Marin, as MacKinley Helm quotes him, has spoken of it as trenchantly as anyone. "Art must show what goes on in the world," he says, and speaks of "this hatred of all things Seen —And taking its place a diseased mental seeing. . . ."

The observation of the objective, the actual outside the person, may be understood in terms of a variety of a priori theories, techniques and goals. Among the critics, Constance Rourke and Ferner Nuhn have been its chief expositors. But it is difficult to name any scientific, engineering or purely mathematical technique which attempts to grasp and project what Henry James called "the sense of the whole." That is the area in which the artist works. It does not matter whether he "has got his facts straight" or not. Every artist must select, project, rearrange—and, if you like, distort—the phenomena of the objective or the subjective world. Thus there may be a "naturalism" of the subjective. Much of the earlier stream-of-consciousness and pseudo-

psychoanalytic writing was just that: as intendedly literal as a psychiatrist's transcription of his patient's monologue.

"In the ancient world before Greece," Edith Hamilton writes in *The Greek Way,* "the things that are not seen had become more and more the only things of great importance." She defines this type of consciousness as Oriental. Thus it may be true to say that much of European literature has become Orientalized in the last hundred years. "The spectacle is in the spectator," said Lamartine. We can observe the increasing concentration on internal phenomena, on the affairs of the psyche, rather than on the external world. Among such works of solipsistic literature we might include much of Dostoevsky, the anamnesis of Proust, Kafka's frugal stories, and a good deal of Joyce. Many of the characters fathered by these writers require an elaborate preparation before the reader may be expected to understand their behavior in the actual world. They are, in short, extreme introverts, in the main. There is often a vital disconnection between what they think or feel and what they do, a disconnection which can be closed only by analysis of their internal disorder. In the old Western American phrase, they "ain't trackin' right."

In Dos Passos' novels, on the other hand, people are active in an active world. He deals with them almost exclusively on the level of behavior—but we must broaden the term *behavior* somewhat in order to take in what he does. The external and the internal become all one flow, as they are for most of us, and as they were for Heraclitus. In Dos Passos the relation between what one *feels* and *what actually happens outside* always remains clear, even in drunken or hallucinatory states. As an example, we might mention the death scene of Charley Anderson in *The Big Money.*

Dos Passos knows that we Americans, or most of us, live in a sharp objective world, whether we like it or not. If we do not, our chances of survival in traffic becomes correspondingly less. Before the traffic, there were Indians; and before the Indians, quick squalls in the neighborhood of Nantucket. We are, in short, a people who have been weeded out. Dos Passos knows too that we live and work amid the proliferation and exfoliation of endless detail, which we are required to grasp in some measure

if we wish to live at all. And he knows, furthermore, that this kind of concentration on the objective grasp, the kinesthetic feel of things, develops a type of personality quite as subtle and cultivated on the objective side as the personality of a religious mystic may be on the subjective. Both, of course, may lack a desirable balance. But because our shorthand American speech, and our whole habit of communicating by rapid hints, obscure this extraordinary cultivation of the objective personality, many Europeans find our technical achievements mysterious—as if a baboon should invent a thermostat—and content themselves with pointing out that we are still somewhat crass, naive and otherwise full of unwisdom on the emotional-subjective side. This may be true, in some measure; and perhaps it would do us no harm to try a little compensation in that quarter, so long as it is our own kind of compensation. But the point I wish to make here is that we *have* achieved a high degree of objective cultivation; that it denotes a culture like any other, having its own emphases and clusters of traits; and that Dos Passos understands and projects this group personality at least as well as any other novelist.

More than that, unlike many American intellectuals, he is intelligently concerned with the way this objective culture has been applied to industry, though he is vigorously opposed to many of its social effects. In the jacket copy on one of Dos Passos' books, his father is referred to as "a Philadelphia lawyer"—which has meant a kind of legal sharper since Revolutionary times. I take this to be a slip, or a little joke. I have read one of the elder Dos Passos' books, called *Commercial Trusts.* Published in 1901, it is a brilliant anti-Brandeis defense of large business combinations against the threat of further regulatory legislation.

All his life, John Dos Passos the younger has been very much on the other side of the fence. Both as a citizen and a writer, he has devoted himself to improving the position of people who work for wages, to defending the more or less socially powerless against the socially powerful, to the defeat of arbitrary authority of every sort, and to maintaining and extending our civil rights. During one whole period in his career—roughly the period embraced in the composition of *U. S. A.*—any reader forced to guess

at his viewpoint might have characterized it as that of a free-lance revolutionary socialist close to the general position of Jean Jaurès, but with Bakuninist trimmings.

This, however, is mere inferential analysis; and we must be wary to distinguish between his own viewpoint—or his viewpoint character—as this becomes more or less explicit in the Camera Eye sections of *U. S. A.*, and the specifically historical or personal opinions of his other characters. It seems to me that the libertarian and the humanitarian in him have always been dominant. Dos Passos and many others, for example, worked to prevent the electrocution of Sacco and Vanzetti in that belated Boston witch hunt of the Twenties; and the solid black weight of his anger, which inspires one of the Camera Eye inserts in *The Big Money* —undiscriminating though it may be in some respects—must make certain ears burn in Boston to this day.

Malcolm Cowley once said of Dos Passos that he is two writers: an individualist and a collectivist. But it seems to me, reading his books in sequence, that he has been at bottom the classic American individualist from the beginning—an individualist with a sense of social responsibility. We can trace, to some extent, the development of his socio-political ideas—all the more easily because they are so close to, though often a little ahead of, the general liberal-radical ideas of his generation. We know that he grew up in the period of Theodore Roosevelt's "the Strenuous Life," itself a vulgarization of pioneerism and the pragmatism of William James. It was, in the main, an optimistic period—reform was possible, and might even come to something—but it blew up in the faces of a whole generation of young men in the First World War.

Fuselli, the good little man in *Three Soldiers,* is keeping his nose clean and bucking for corporal. He becomes one of the earliest of a long line of conformers in Dos Passos who, like the reformers, end up in the soup. (On the title page of any Dos Passos novel might be inscribed the legend: "You can't win.") The other two major characters—Chrisfield, the Indiana country boy, and Andrews, the musician—are individualists so extreme that they come close to anarchism. ". . . what's the use of getting

along if you haven't any world to get along in?" says Andrews. But they are both unmistakably in the American tradition.

"Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God," said Thomas Jefferson, with that neat gift for involving the Deity in politics which we have somewhat lost since the eighteenth century. There are intimations and hopes of revolution in Dos Passos' first novel, *One Man's Initiation* (reprinted as *First Encounter*), and in *Three Soldiers.* They reappear again and again in the later novels, up to the end of *U. S. A.* What are these hopes? We know that the Russian Revolution of 1917 seemed at first to promise a romantic new world to a whole generation of young American liberals. But as early as *Orient Express,* Dos Passos goes into Russia to see for himself—and to see with that objective vision that has always distinguished him. He passes one of the Cheka jails at night, the sentries, the barbed wire. "As we walked past," he says, "trying to close our nostrils to the jail smell, the idyll crashed about our ears." It was no place for a libertarian. And he quotes the remark of an Esthonian woman who had just come out of Russia. " 'Oh, they make me so angry,' she says. 'They just go about and if they find anybody wants to do anything, they say: Stop it. Stop it.' "

It is easy to see now that Dos Passos has been an American individualist first and last, and that his basic concern has always been the realization of the free individual in the free society. It seems probable, as I have mentioned, that for a long time he believed that this freedom could only be reached through some form of socialism. That too is an old American custom. We know that nineteenth-century America was full of socialist communities: the Brook Farmers, Oneida Community, New Harmony on the Wabash (which turned out to be Old Discord), and the beehive Zion of the Mormons. The point reaches a comic note in S. P. Waterlow's recollections of Henry James, written in 1907: " . . . He felt tempted to call himself a rabid Socialist, so often does a great wind carry him off his feet and set him down somewhere far beyond and ahead of the present world." James had always believed in the Great Good Country, but never found it. Perhaps he had only left it behind. America is Utopia by definition, and we all have that bee in our bonnets.

We are all eaters of pie-in-the-sky. Thus there is a long historical discrepancy between what we like to believe we are and what we actually are. Dos Passos has understood this as well as any other writer—indeed, it is one of his refrains—and has always made sad ironic use of the American hiatus between myth and fact.

But he is also the classic American idealist. The sense of a preordained fate in his novels is as strong, and also as programmatic, as in the novels of Hardy. From Fuselli, in the American Army of 1917, to Paul Graves, one of the New Dealers in *The Grand Design,* his characters get the short end of the stick. Curiously enough, this sense of fatedness is not usually present in Dos Passos' nonfiction, which is often full of a cheerful, vigorous joy in people and the rest of the natural world. More and more, too, the books of social observation have been touched with a discriminating and clarified hope quite absent from the novels.

But we know that the pattern of individual failure *is* all too often one of the stigmata of American life. The race *is,* in general, to the swift, and the battle to the strong—both perhaps modified by less engaging qualities. Nonetheless it *was* possible to maintain one's integrity even in the 1918 Army or New Deal Washington. Defeat is not the certain reward of virtue. It is, in the end, not reasonable to assume that war and politics can be conducted on the plane of a Socratic argument; nor need that fact make us cynical. It may be that Dos Passos' characters, like many Americans who feel that they have failed, simply ask too much. They have an un-Deweyan contempt for short goals and small victories. The quality of luck, of nonsense, of the gratuitous—what we embody in the phrase: "Those things happen"—is certainly present in all human life, even under the tightest organization. And we Americans live in one of the most loosely arranged societies on record. Every first-rate novelist has allowed for these gratuitous things, or employed them as effects; and only the intransigent idealist of theory or thesis can rule them out. Dos Passos does get much of this into his novels, in detail. But his characters tend to feel that *someone* is responsible for *everything;* and we know that in any society we have heard of —even in Hitler's fanatic rat-trap, or Stalin's modest little concentration camp—this has not been true.

It was clear, at least as early as 1937, that Dos Passos recognized and was outraged by the ruthless organized opportunism of the Communists in the Spanish Civil War. In 1939 he published *Adventures of A Young Man,* in which a Tom Jones kind of American radical, who believes only in "the truth," is conducted through the savage machinery of the Communist Party USA to his eventual death in Spain at the hands of his former comrades. When I read it first, I thought it much too unsubtle and coarse-grained to be a faithful picture of American Stalinist operations, at least during the United Front period. But this crudeness fades out somewhat on re-reading. The essentials are there, and I think that they are true. Despite its oversimplifications, it is a dense, powerfully organized piece of work, and perhaps the most damning indictment of American Communism yet written by any novelist.

The next step in Dos Passos' political evolution, *The Ground We Stand On,* published in 1941, is a testament of conversion, or re-conversion. In it, I think, Dos Passos returns to the main line of American socio-political development. The evils he has fought he still fights. The reformer's warm-hearted zeal is undiminished. Ironic observers may point out that his discovery of Roger Williams and Jefferson appears to be a little late. But it *is* his own—though a book in so well-worked a field could hardly be predominantly original. It leans a good deal on Parrington and Bowers and, I think, Ernest Sutherland Bates' *American Faith.* But the amateur scholarship is thorough and independent-minded, and it turns up a number of valuable new emphases. For one thing, it makes Roger Williams a major figure, as I suggest we shall more and more tend to do. It does some hard and fruitful digging into the sources of our liberal ideas as these may be traced in seventeenth-century English Antinomianism. And it quotes a letter—printed entire for the first time, as Dos Passos believes—in which Joel Barlow asserts, in 1795, that Washington commissioned Gouverneur Morris, while Morris was American ambassador to France, as a secret agent to the English government. I have consulted a Washington specialist, Mr. Saxe Commins, on this point. He tells me that, as late as 1799, Washington wrote that he had never seen any document containing these

charges, though he had heard of Barlow's letter. Thus the charges, so far as I can find out, have been neither proved nor disproved. But one of Dos Passos' major points—that the conservative Federalist historians early established a one-sided view of our past which has never been thoroughly corrected—may gain some weight thereby.

Perhaps more than any other book of his, *The Ground We Stand On* seems to clinch Dos Passos' major orientation on American society, and the distinction he appears to make between the cultures of the Western Hemisphere and those of Europe and Asia. At one time or another, he has traveled from Iraq on the east to Manila in the west, always with a sympathetic eye to the local; but his almost habitual cosmopolitanism has left him still firmly grounded on American earth. "Like so many Americans after him, who have tried to become citizens of Europe," he writes, "Barlow had suddenly found himself at a point where he could go no further." Had Dos Passos himself found it necessary to learn that?

It would be hard to imagine two American writers so dissimilar as Henry James and John Dos Passos. But even James, as Hamlin Garland remembered, had his moment of total reversion —or perhaps only of nostalgic guilt or doubt. " 'If I were to live my life over again,' he said in a low voice, fixing upon me a sombre glance, 'I would be an American. I would steep myself in America, I would know no other land. I would study its beautiful side [*sic*]. The mixture of Europe and America which you see in me has proved disastrous. It has made of me a man who is neither American nor European. I have lost touch with my own people and I live here alone. . . .' "

Dos Passos has taken the other turning.

III

In *The Memoirs of Alexander Herzen,* there is a passage in which Count Strogonov mentions Gogol's story, "The Overcoat," and remarks that it " 'pulls the greatcoat off the shoulders of every one of us. Put yourself in my place,' he says, 'and then look at that story.' 'That's v-very d-difficult for me,' Yevgeny

Korsh replies. 'I am not used to looking at things from the point of view of a man who has thirty thousand souls.' "

Every novelist, I think, would be wryly touched by that phrase —"a man who has thirty thousand souls"—and Dos Passos not least. If there are not thirty thousand characters in his books, there seem to be. He is not, of course, always successful even with the major ones. I think that Mac, for example, in *U. S. A.,* tends to become more and more a stick on which the action is hung. But Dos Passos is so often and usually successful that we can only marvel at his evocative skill and his liberal acquaintance with the human race. If sensibility is the medium, character is the core of the novelist's art. I can think of no living novelist—not Romains, nor Lewis, nor Gallegos, nor Malraux—who exceeds him in the range and diversity of people he has created.

Doctor Talcott, Gladys Spingarn and Irving Silverstone in *Adventures of A Young Man;* Jeannette the refugee, Père Washburn and the Judge in *The Grand Design;* Hugh Henry Brackenridge or Joel Barlow in *The Ground We Stand On;* Annabelle and G. H. Barrow and Joe Askew and Doris Humphries in *U. S. A.;* the Sayyid and Jassem in *Orient Express*:—any dozen of his minor characters, picked blindfold, would have made the fortune of a lesser writer; and he gives nearly all of them a kind of instantaneous life. I think it is noticeable, in general, that his male characters are more effective than the women. (We might argue, indeed, that Dos Passos' world is too much a man's world to be any sort of balanced replica of American society.)

His children, perhaps, come out best of all: Janey and Alec at the Great Falls, Jimmy Herf in his New York hotel, Margo growing up on Broad Channel Island in Jamaica Bay, young Joel Carroll getting into trouble, Mac and Milly on the train to Chicago, and Ellie Thatcher sitting with her father on the bench in Battery Park. " ' . . . You wouldn't like your daddy any better if he were rich would you?' " her father asks, and Ellie answers: " 'Oh yes I would daddy.' " And we have the two characters, the childish wryness of the answer, and one of the main compulsives of American life—all in one touch.

Dos Passos' child characters seem to carry his terrible nostalgia for the years that are gone, the years before the First World War,

when there were men in every American city who could remember shooting snipe on the flats where the post office now stands. These children in his books, like the defeated and the wronged, are enveloped in a mournful and protective tenderness. For the most part, they grow up in battered circumstances, in an American landscape half wild, sweet with wildness, and half slum—the slum, too, sweet with liberty and a child's taken-for-granted acceptance of the familiar. See, see, the author seems to say to us, even this was better, this boys' escapade on a dirty creek flashing with the broken mirrors of ten-o'clock sunlight. We grow up badly. It is not merely that we lose the innocence of our eyes. We lose the innocence of our hopes.

"Joel Barlow," says Dos Passos, and it becomes a refrain in his engaging sketch of that worthy, "Joel Barlow was a man who never turned down a trip if he could help it." Dos Passos must have had a cheerful notion as to just how well the phrase fitted him too. Certainly he belongs among the most traveled Americans of our period. In *Tour of Duty,* the first part of which details his trip to the Pacific in 1944, he mentions the little Marine he met in Honolulu who asked him which way he was bound. "Forward areas," Dos Passos said. "Ain't you kind of old for that?" said the little Marine.

"I answered stiffly that correspondents came all ages," Dos Passos writes. But he must have remembered the Argonne (his characters usually refer to it as "the Oregon"), the Battle of Paris, the comic and indefatigable bedbugs in the Russian train eastbound from Batum, the feast at Teheran on the tenth day of Moharram (it is one of the best scenes in the work of a masterly writer of vignettes), the *haremi* on their white ponies riding and firing like Sioux round the caravan at Jebal Souab, the nights haunted by armed deputies among the mine tipples of Kentucky, the song about Zapata's ghost heard at Yautepec, spring riots in Paris, the "slight tendency to stand in doorways" as the shells came down the Gran Via in Madrid. Ten thousand days and nights and events and people woven into the texture of one life.

Because he is not so much a reporter as a social observer—reporters may risk their necks, but a writer risks his whole sensibility, including the neck--he has been able to give us the imme-

diate sense of a variety of scenes quite unparalleled in any recent writer I know of other than the professional travelers. His more or less consistent intent, I think, has been very close to the watercolor method of John Marin, as MacKinley Helm characterizes it. Dos Passos, like Marin, attempts to catch the first vividness of experience, the very glittering motion of life, and to reduce it at the same instant to some formal order. The analogy seems strikingly apt. We can find no closer equivalent to a scene in *Manhattan Transfer,* say, than such a watercolor of the same period as Marin's "Lower Manhattan from the River, No. 2, 1921."

This method incurs the liabilities of its virtues, and Dos Passos has not escaped them. Much of his fiction, even the best, has the quality of brilliant improvisation—not in structure, but in the minutiae of scene and situation. It is clear that he values freshness, instancy, quickness of eye and ear, above other qualities in the observer and the writer. His work exploits these qualities to a remarkable degree. These are, to a great extent, the things we like him for. But they imply, in many cases, the exclusion of other qualities. They call for the rapid and lifelike invention of a situation, an invention under pressure; and this attack undeniably produces effects to be caught in no other way. A good novelist can make us believe almost anything he pleases, and Dos Passos does. But the plausible and the striking, the apt and typical and shrewd, the little scene beautifully knocked off, are elements among others. They are not the whole story—and the whole story, as James might have said, putting the phrase in quotation marks, is precisely that slow maturing in the imagination we have come to expect from a writer of the first order: the season of growth that ripens and rounds and colors an apple or a book. We seldom, perhaps never, feel that Dos Passos' novels have been allowed this final ripening. The greenness is still on them, and they have the charm of greenness, of the fruit picked too soon. But they are sometimes hard to the teeth, and their flavor is a little acid.

Nevertheless, it is curious to observe how the years have toned down those technical effects in Dos Passos that seemed to us at first somewhat shrill and pretentious. The basic question we must ask of any stylistic or formal device is: Does it work? In

the main, I believe that Dos Passos' effects do work—and I have come round to that opinion very slowly, and by degrees. The evolution of the means he has used to contrast the public and private views, or the anonymous and the personal, or the group and the individual, in our society has proceeded steadily through what may be called the absorptive treatment in *Three Soldiers,* the italic chapter heads in *Manhattan Transfer,* and the Newsreels, Camera Eye and Biographies in *U. S. A.,* to the collective or group usage of the pronoun *we*—the soundest of all, I think—in the italic passages of *The Grand Design.* But all of them seem to me now more effective—effective, that is, in the sense that even the saliency of the device contributes to its meaning—and less pretentious than I at first supposed them.

If we recall Kenneth Burke's definition of style as minor form, we may trace the evolution of Dos Passos' fictional style, beginning with the predominance of fresh but relatively soft sense impressions in *One Man's Initiation* and *Three Soldiers.* In the next stage, *Manhattan Transfer,* it has a kind of fragmentary glitter intended to evoke those rapid simultaneous particles of sensation that filled the consciousness of most New Yorkers in the Twenties. With the opening volume of *U. S. A., The 42nd Parallel,* a new style appears, no less immediate than the treatment of *Manhattan Transfer,* but less particularized in sense impressions, more fluid, and more closely woven. It has a new largeness of effect, and for Dos Passos, a new selective principle—or rather a selective principle raised to ascendancy for the first time. It is designed to pick out, in the individual experience of each character, those aspects which will best reveal the social patterns—of status and time and place, of work or play or love-making—through which he moves.

The versatility of this treatment, which has the idiomatic suppleness of a stylized colloquial monologue, is in fact astonishing. It is full of vitality. Its clean, rather workaday surface, besides offering an excellent textural contrast to the poetic intensity of the Camera Eye and the relative boldness of the other intercut sections, is capable of transmitting a remarkable variety of shadings. In one smooth flow it catches up the rather cosy smugness

of a Chicago lady esthete and the drunken rage of an American sailor on the beach at St. Nazaire.

But with the first book of the second trilogy, *Adventures of A Young Man,* there is a further shift in style, less noticeable than the second, but apparently no less calculated. It is grayer in tone, the sense impressions are much less vivid; and we may say in general that the socially typical detail has been largely subordinated to permit a more thorough cultivation of the individual character, in what is still a series of representative situations. For the first time Dos Passos chooses to make use of a single protagonist—Glenn Spotswood in the opening novel of the trilogy. and the Huey Long figure in *Number One.* We might, in fact, be somewhat justified in assuming that in the successive novels of this trilogy the author had intended to represent three of the symbolic figures in American politics: the Radical, the Demagogue and the Liberal. But in the third book, *The Grand Design,* we have something like a return to the composite method of *U. S. A.;* and no single figure—not Millard Carroll, nor Walker Watson, nor Paul Graves—becomes dominant. In *The Grand Design,* too, it is apparent that the style is no longer dense enough to convey the necessary complexity of reference.

What are the other qualities of Dos Passos' writing? Except for that scene in *Manhattan Transfer* in which Achmet spits in the face of his dead, tyrannical master, we may look in vain for any passion but the passion against social injustice. There is much anguish, but none of that terrible and sorrowful possession —in work, in love, in grief or revenge, even in certain moments of battle—which alone can compensate the miseries of our human journey. In Dos Passos' chronicles of a nation much given to murder, I can recall only two or three incidental ones. Compassion is there, and a considerable leaven of poetic feeling, nearly always on the plane of the senses. We find little adventuring in ideas beyond the reach of the "practical," but a truly magnificent curiosity about men and events, the colors of the earth, the active shapes of machines, and the rising and fading of the sun. If we largely miss those bizarre variations of the human heart to be found in Gide, or Romains' Quinette, we are given a full measure of the common things.

In his introduction to the Modern Library edition of *The 42nd Parallel,* Dos Passos writes: " . . . like the pioneers who had to move west into the prairie as soon as the farm they'd just cleared could grow a good crop of corn, writers who want to do primary inventive work will have to keep moving forward into the wilderness. The pure scientist has to do the same thing." Thus he translates Frederick Jackson Turner into literature. "No one will thank them for their work. Age and fatigue will overcome them with no roof over their heads; they'll come to bad ends. But so long as men are found among us who, confronted by welltilled fields yielding a rich harvest to the second generation of exploiters, can't help feeling an intolerable itch to push beyond, to test continually slogans, needs and commonplaces in the light of freshly felt experience, American writing will continue alive. . . . " We who come after him, and even push beyond, will find his blazes on the trails.

The Basic Unity of Eugene O'Neill

A. M. I. FISKIN

Eugene O'Neill is one of those, among our contemporaries, who have been most frequently discussed and reviewed, praised or damned, and I feel some hesitation therefore in adding to this confusion of tongues. The reason for this multiplication of opinion is clear enough, however. There was a lack of perspective, and perhaps there is still, for how is one to determine at what point perspective becomes possible. By a somewhat arbitrary convention it exists the morning after the announcement of the artist's death. I think, however, I have decided that perspective on O'Neill is possible now. I was not one of those who found *The Iceman Cometh* dull—very much the contrary—but I realized as I sat in the theater watching a production of the play that I was partaking of a cultural anachronism. It was with an effort that I recalled that this was a play written, presumably, in 1939 by a major American dramatist, produced for the first time in 1946. It felt, it *tasted* like a revival of some play written twenty years earlier. The dramatist seems somehow to have been passed by; and this means, indeed, that we have achieved perspective on Eugene O'Neill.

O'Neill's plays demand a more disinterested evaluation. The critical wars waged too furiously about him. There was of course the ever refreshed genius-versus-charlatan controversy; there were the recurrent statements of O'Neill's defalcations from the paths of truth. The critics almost universally agreed that there were two O'Neills; they did not agree on the point at which the split occurred. Very early they noted that O'Neill had forsaken the sea; then they deplored that he had forsaken realism for the morass of Expressionism; the critics of the left regretted his bourgeois deviationism after *The Hairy Ape.* Next they viewed with alarm the fact that O'Neill had embraced Freud, and finally they insisted that in *Days Without End* he had returned to the Roman Catholicism of his parents.

The repeated surprises of the reviewers at O'Neill's seeming shifts of position are not difficult to understand. Dramatic reviewing is occasional, and inevitably each reviewer had looked at O'Neill from his own vantage point. O'Neill was classified as "modern." He dealt with problems that were shocking to the audience; his plays were Expressionistic in technique; his characters were motivated in Freudian terms. Inevitably, therefore, attention was directed towards these elements, all interesting, but no one of them central to the artist's problem. Since O'Neill was engaged in a personal and, to a considerable extent, original reinterpretation of experience, they saw only inconsistency.

It can now be seen that there is a basic unity in the plays, from almost the first to the latest, a unity in terms of an evolving interpretation of reality. O'Neill's various experiments are the efforts of a man to find an adequate mode of expression for a philosophy that was involved, a little tortured, perhaps not really profound, but certainly consistent. The elaborate non-representational stages of *The Fountain* or *The Hairy Ape* or *The Great God Brown,* with the devices of Expressionism—the chorus, the chants, the stylized movements and the masks, were not suitable for fine nuances, but were eminently suitable for the presentation of the positive and flamboyant; and O'Neill's interpretation of Being and Becoming is both positive and flamboyant. We can see why the Freudian approach to characteriza-

tion was useful. O'Neill's system demanded a multi-phased personality, the woman, for the symbol of Becoming, and the complex Freudian analysis of the relationships of children to parents, wife to husband, offered him the material he needed. So with much of the sensational in the plays: the typical twentieth century approach to the New England character, the machine worship in *Dynamo,* the racial problem in *All God's Chillun.* In every case O'Neill exploited current ideas, philosophic or esthetic, psychological or sociological, for the presentation of his creed.

J. W. Krutch, in his introduction to O'Neill's *Nine Plays* says:

> As for myself, I find my mind going constantly back to a remark which he once let fall in conversation. "Most modern plays," he said, "are concerned with the relation between man and man, but that does not interest me at all. I am interested only in the relation between man and God."

Later in the same paragraph Krutch quotes from a letter of O'Neill's that appeared in the *Intimate Notebooks* of George Jean Nathan:

> . . . the sickness of today . . . the death of the old God and the failure of science and materialism to give any satisfying new one for the surviving primitive religious instinct to find a meaning for life in, and to comfort its fear of death with. It seems to me that anyone trying to do big work nowadays must have this big subject behind all the little subjects of his plays and novels . . .

Negatively, this means, of course, that it is not the central purpose of *Desire Under the Elms* or *Mourning Becomes Electra* to portray the classic New England inhibitions in action or broken; nor does *All God's Chillun* constitute one more blast on the subject of the Negro problem; rather these are the situations out of which grow the dramatic problem O'Neill particularly wants to consider. Of the positive implications, O'Neill is well aware. The search for gods in a godless age is difficult. The other man's gods are always unsatisfactory and frequently bizarre, and an audience's reaction is often one of acute discomfort. If

the artist permits himself to be overly sensitive to this embarrassment, he is bound to be anemic. O'Neill falls frequently into the bizarre, and all too often he lacks the sense of humor necessary to recognize a pitfall, but he is never anemic.

In dramatic practice the search for a god seems to become identified with violent obsessions or with equally violent aspirations. From this point of view O'Neill's plays fall into three groups not quite chronologically distinct, and logical, although not inevitable, outgrowths of each other. In the first group of plays he is concerned almost entirely with the fact of obsession. His protagonists have roots or aspirations. It is in these that O'Neill is interested. Their strength and their effects upon the characters are the particular concern. Sometimes they ennoble, sometimes they destroy the protagonists; occasionally there is incidental value judgment upon the "worthiness" of the roots or obsession, but it is the fact with which O'Neill is concerned, not the worth.

In the second group, O'Neill through a number of plays sets up a view of the universe that he believes to be correct, his own brand of natural theology. It is a naturalistic mysticism, which tries to take account of the place of evil and, particularly, suffering in life, and which tries to parallel microcosmically through the human beings the macrocosm of the metaphysical order.

The third group consists of plays in which this system, so laboriously set up, is largely assumed, and human beings, who parallel this metaphysical system and therefore symbolize it, are shown in action within the vicissitudes of human affairs. In these the emphasis on women is especially great. They parallel in their life function the function of Earth in the metaphysic.

II

The obsessions in O'Neill's early plays took various forms, usually individual experiments in the god-hunt, each play presenting a particular substitute its protagonist had developed.

Captain Keeney of *Ile,* one of the earliest of these, finds his sense of worth in his success as a whaler:

> It ain't the damned money what's keepin' me up in the Northern seas, Tom. But I can't go back to Homeport with a measly four hundred barrel of ile. I'd die fust. I ain't never come back home in all my days without a full ship. Ain't that truth? . . .

Later, to his wife he says:

> I always come back—with a full ship—and—it don't seem right not to—somehow. I been always first whalin' skipper out o' Homeport, and—Don't you see my meanin' Annie?

At the moment when Keeney is prepared to turn back, because he feels his wife is going mad, there is a cry — "whales ahead." Keeney's determination returns, and the curtain drops as Mrs. Keeney starts to play the organ madly. And O'Neill implies that it is right that he follow. Had Keeney turned back, he, rather than his wife would have been broken, for O'Neill has little sympathy for the weakling.

In *The Hairy Ape,* O'Neill is again concerned with the problem of the personal symbols to which the character attributes value, and in the attachment to which he finds the certainty of his being and worth. Yank identifies himself with fire and steel and the ship that seems to him to possess their force. They are the ultimates, the *primum mobile* that alone "belongs." He dominates the stokehold by virtue of his complete identification with that which dominates them all; the men are but a chorus, echoing and reinforcing him in his ecstatic worship. The sudden destruction of these roots leaves Yank dangling. Offended by the contemptuous disgust of a woman, he would willingly take refuge in the certainty that she does not "belong," did he not know that she was the daughter of the man who was the president of Nazareth Steel, and the chairman of the board of directors of the ship's line. Her identification with steel is greater than his! Now the chorus mocks him, the rootless.

The problem of finding a new force worthy of his worship and identification, is too great for Yank. The remaining scenes of the play represent repeated attempts to find meaning, to find a god, all of which meet with continued repulses or complete indifference from society. His death at the end is theatrically

effective. Actually he is dying in what O'Neill considers the significant sense, for the four last scenes.

Beyond the Horizon, O'Neill's first full-length play, is about two brothers who deny their gods. Because of the facile fickleness of a woman, the two men change roles. The "poet," Robert Mayo, about to leave on a long journey, a man presumably destined to search beyond the horizon, stays on the farm to marry the woman who jilted his brother Andrew. Andrew, in anger, professes a hatred for the farm he actually loves, and goes to sea instead.

The play is a tragedy of these three people, two of whom suffer because they denied their own nature; the third, because of her weakness and spiritual poverty. Andrew and Robert are obviously contrasted. Robert has "a touch of the poet about him," and Andrew is "an opposite type to Robert . . . a son of the soil, intelligent in a shrewd way, but with nothing of the intellectual about him." Robert wants to leave. "It's just Beauty that's calling me, the beauty of the far off and unknown, . . . in quest of the secret . . . beyond the horizon," while Andrew is ". . . wedded to the soil . . . as much a product of it as an ear of corn is, or a tree."

Although Robert's dream is at best a vague and naive romanticism, it is genuine; his attempt to "take a real interest" in the farm is doomed to failure. The bit of the poet that was in him should have warned him that the Earth is a jealous mistress, and will not be served, as he serves her, secondarily. Andrew completely denies his roots.

> Robert: You—a farmer—to gamble in a wheat pit with scraps of paper. There's a spiritual significance in that picture, Andy . . . . You're the deepest dyed failure of the three, Andy. You've spent eight years running away from yourself . . . . gambling with the thing you used to love to create . . . . you'll have to suffer to win back . . . .
>
> Andrew: I think I know what you're driving at, Rob—and it's true, I guess.

And it is obvious that O'Neill expects us too to see what Robert means, and to believe it true. Andrew has denied his

roots—and is therefore a failure. Robert has denied his aspiration and is therefore a failure, although there is some sort of suggestion of a triumph for him in that clear vision that preceded his death. For Ruth, the weakling, O'Neill has no sympathy.

III

There are obvious but slight indications in these early plays, all plays of what I called O'Neill's first group, of a mystic approach to life. In three later plays, *The Fountain, Great God Brown,* and *Lazarus Laughed,* this mysticism is explicitly stated, in positive terms, and with a force and sincerity that suggest that they represent not merely a dramatic world, but the conviction of the author.

The Fountain is O'Neill's first statement of his system. A highly romanticized Ponce de Leon, the complete soldier seeking only the glory of Spain, becomes obsessed by the words of the song of a Moorish minstrel sung on the night of the capture of Granada, and seeks the Fountain of Youth. Twenty years later, Governor of Porto Rico, Juan is made acutely conscious of his age by the arrival of a young ward from Spain, and wants more than ever to find the Fountain. He tortures a captured Indian, Nano, until the Indian promises to lead him to such a fountain. Juan goes to Florida. At the fountain to which Nano leads him Juan is shot down by Indians, and there in a vision he is shown the essential unity of life and existence. The vision is such as to prove the continuity of the myth to which he was so attached—"round and round the world—from old worlds to new," and to identify all faiths. As the vision proceeds, the point of the recurrent song is reinforced.

> Age—Youth—They are the same rhythm of eternal life.
>
> Fountain Everlasting, time without end! Soaring flame of the spirit transfiguring Death! All is within! All things dissolve, flow on eternally! O, aspiring fire of life, sweep the dark soul of man! Let us burn in the unity!
>
> [And then, finally] Thou art the All in One, the One in All—the Eternal Becoming which is Beauty.

This solution of the problem of the *one* and the *many,* the explanation of the relation between the transitory and the permanent arrived at in this scene, is exactly the theme of the song, for in its various forms it identifies age, youth, beauty, love, life, and God in one great cycle of Being. This cyclical approach to experience is emphasized in other ways. Juan's love for Beatriz finds its success through his nephew, an obvious recurrence of the young Juan; Luis, the dreamer poet, turns monk, an appropriate development in terms of the theme of the play; and at the end a *te Deum* and a song blend religion and love, all aspects of the same Becoming that is Being.

The play was not successful, but its meaning was clear enough. Juan sought to realize his ideal, misunderstanding it, however, and finally found it in an acceptance of the beauty of life's recurrent cycle. Unfortunately, we must add, the vision is the least happy of all dramatic devices.

O'Neill's next serious attempt at the problem was *Great God Brown* in 1925, three years later. *Great God Brown* is probably O'Neill's most difficult play, although it may be hoped that the arguments about the masks are by now at an end.

Essentially the play falls into the Pilgrim's Progress mold with this difference, that the pilgrimage demands two lifetimes for its completion. Dion Anthony is an understandable dramatic combination: Dionysus-St. Anthony. He had assumed the Dionysic mask on the occasion of an injury by one he had thought a friend. As the play proceeded, the dichotomy became ever more marked; the mask became diabolical, the face more saint-like.

The difficulty in this play lies in the death of Anthony, and what one might call the testament scene. Billy Brown, the typical businessman, completely lacks any creative force. Of this his sterility implied in the play is an obvious symbol. The creative impulse in the work of the architectural firm is supplied by Anthony. However, halfway through the play Anthony dies, and there "wills" himself to Brown.

> My last will and testament! I leave Dion Anthony to William Brown—for him to love and obey—for him to become me.

It is the new Dion Anthony-Billy Brown who is Man and must carry on. In terms of this character, the search for understanding of the nature of reality is completed. In a moment of triumphant vision at the end, he understands: "Our Father who art,"—the simple postulation of existence. The changing and cyclical nature of Becoming is observed through Cybel, the Earth-mother-mate symbol. The mask Cybel wears before the world is that of the prostitute, but to Dion Anthony, and then to Dion Brown she is the mother and comforter. In her occasional speeches she makes clear the importance of the eternal cycle of birth, growth, maturity, age, dissolution, and rebirth in nature, in the seasons, and in man's life.

> (with a profound pain) Always spring comes again bearing life! . . . . spring again!—life again!—summer and fall and death and peace again!—(with agonized sorrow)—but always, always, love and conception and birth and pain again—spring bearing the intolerable chalice of life again! . . . . bearing the glorious, blazing crown of life again! (She stands like an idol of Earth, her eyes staring out over the world).

In *Lazarus Laughed* the relationships between Being and Becoming are most clearly indicated through the characters of Lazarus and Miriam. "The laughter of Heaven" Brown said just before he died, "sows Earth with a rain of tears, and out of Earth's transfigured birth-pain the laughter of Man returns . . . in innumerable dancing gales of flame upon the knees of God!" While it is difficult, perhaps, for the participant to see suffering as the laughter of God, it is just this realization that is important.

Lazarus has been dead, and has returned to life; he is complete; for he has seen Existence whole and has arrived through absolute knowledge at the Everlasting Yea. He alone, of the more than 200 characters and chorus members, wears no mask, presumably as a sign of his emancipation from the vicissitudes of this life. He meets all the difficulties of this life, only with laughter, for he must, and does, categorically deny finiteness in all its manifestations of evil, pain, ugliness, and death. Our life and its struggle hold no mystery for him, and little interest.

Suffering in the course of the play he encounters in plenty, but his magnificent laughter, "with a wonderful exultant acceptance in it" overcomes all difficulties. He is the eternal Being, opposed to time-space Becoming.

Miriam, his wife, is the character symbolization of Becoming. Since she is not so completely realized as Lazarus, she wears a half mask, and the mask is "the pure pallor of marble, the expression that of a statue of Woman, of her eternal acceptance of the compulsion of motherhood, the inevitable cycle of love into pain into joy, and new love into separation and pain again and the loneliness of age." To deny the existence of pain and birth, sorrow and death in the perfect conception of Being of Lazarus would be a denial of her very function, for without death there could be no renewal and no motherhood. For this reason when everyone else is caught by Lazarus' infectious laughter, she alone is silent. She does accept the eternal unity of existence, but accepts in a fashion that includes suffering and pain, and triumphs over them. At one place the difference between her and Lazarus is clearly pointed:

> Miriam: . . . Those who have just died were like your children, Lazarus. They believed in you and loved you.
>
> Lazarus: And I loved them!
>
> Miriam: Then how could you laugh when they were dying?
>
> Lazarus: (exultingly) Did they not laugh? That was their victory and glory! (With more and more of a passionate, proud exultation) Eye to eye with the Fear of Death, did they not laugh with scorn? "Death to old Death," they laughed! . . . "We will to die! We will to change! Laughing we lived with our gift, now with laughter give we back that gift to become again the Essence of the Giver! Dying we laugh with the Infinite. We are the Giver and the Gift! Laughing we will our own annihilation! Laughing we give our lives for Life's sake!" . . .
>
> Miriam: . . . I cannot understand, Lazarus . . . They were like your children—and they have died. Must you not mourn for them?

Lazarus: (gently) Mourn? When they laughed?

Miriam: (sadly) They are gone from us. And their mothers weep.

Lazarus: . . . But God, their Father, laughs! . . .

As the play proceeds, Miriam is represented as mother to all humanity, and mother to Lazarus as well. Lazarus becomes steadily younger, while Miriam grows older, so that, at the time of her death, she is more than mate to Lazarus—she is again the eternal mother-mate-Earth woman.

IV

There is little question, however, that Becoming rather than Being is the more useful for dramatic purposes, and the plays would suggest that O'Neill himself realized this. Three of his best known plays are concerned primarily not with the god-like man, but in some form with the Earth-mother-mate woman. And we must understand the nature of O'Neill's ideal woman before we can see clearly the motivation and the significance of these twentieth century she-tragedies. All these women are potentially ideal, according to O'Neill's canon, except that circumstances or society forces them into situations that result in the tragic denouement.

The part played by Freudian concepts in these three plays, *Desire Under the Elms, Strange Interlude,* and *Mourning Becomes Electra* is obvious, but their importance has been frequently exaggerated. "They are," says Krutch, "the foundation, not the structure, the beginning, not the end, of what the dramatist has to say." The Freudian system, indeed, seems to have appealed to O'Neill because it fit so well with what he believes to be the mystic drives of the actions of his characters.

Desire Under the Elms is appropriately named. The elms brood over the scene and have become almost human, while the humans have become very like the elms. The one characteristic they all have in common is their attachment to the hard but life-giving soil. Insofar as they are so attached, they are strong; Ephriam Cabot, the old man, is the strongest because in him

this attachment is strongest. It is that which supplies meaning to his life.

> But I give in t'weakness once. . . . There was a party leavin', givin' up, goin' West. I jined 'em. . . . We come t'broad medders, plains, whar the soil was black an' rich as gold. Nary a stone, Easy. Ye'd on'y to plow an' sow and then set an' smoke yer pipe an' watch thin's grow. . . . but the voice of God sayin' "This haint wuth nothin' t'Me. Git ye back t'hum.". . . . Ay-eh. I actoolly give up what was rightful mine! God's hard, not easy! God's in the stones! Build my church on a rock—out o' stones an' I'll be in them! That's what He meant t'Peter.

In this obsession with the soil he resembles the protagonists of O'Neill's early plays. To him Abbie is more than woman; she is Earth.

> Ay-eh. Sometimes ye air the farm an' sometimes the farm be yew. That's why I clove t'ye in my lonesomeness. . . . Me an' the farm has got t'beget a son!

Abbie herself is aware of her affiliation with Earth:

> Hain't the sun strong an' hot? Ye kin feel it burnin' into the earth—Nature—makin' thin's grow—bigger 'n' bigger—burnin' inside ye—makin' ye want t' grow—into somethin' else—til ye're jined with it—an' it's your'n—but it owns ye too—an' makes ye grow bigger—like a tree—like them elums—. . . .

The parallel between the mother-mate and Abbie is developed in her relations with Eben. She feels she must usurp the parlor which had been the favorite room of Eben's mother, and with it Eben as well. Her first seduction of Eben occurs there.

> Abbie: (both her arms around him—with wild passion) I'll sing fur ye! I'll die fur ye! (In spite of her overwhelming desire for him, there is a sincere maternal love in her manner and voice—a horribly frank mixture of lust and mother love) Don't cry, Eben! I'll take yer Maw's place! I'll be everythin' she was t' ye! Let me kiss ye, Eben! . . . . Don't be afeerd! I'll kiss ye pure, Eben—same's if I was a Maw t'ye—an' ye kin kiss me back's if yew was my son—my

boy—sayin' goodnight t'me! Kiss me, Eben. (They kiss in restrained fashion. Then suddenly wild passion overcomes her. She kisses him lustfully again and again and he flings his arms about her and returns her kisses. Suddenly . . . he frees himself from her violently and springs to his feet. He is trembling all over, in a strange state of terror. Abbie strains her arms toward him with fierce pleading) Don't ye leave me, Eben! Can't ye see it hain't enuf—lovin' ye like a Maw—can't ye see it's got t' be that an' more—much more—a hundred times more—fur me t' be happy—fur yew t'be happy?

There is no hypocrisy in this speech, as the stage directions make clear. The scene reveals very clearly the approach O'Neill takes to women. The tragedy in this play arises out of the conflict between the character and the situation within which she is placed, circumstances making impossible the full realization of her temperament. The situation finally leads her to the murder of her child, the worst of all crimes, for it is a denial of her very function as O'Neill sees it.

Nina Leeds, the heroine of *Strange Interlude*, is probably the best known of all O'Neill's heroines. She too is obviously O'Neill's Earth-mother-mate, warped by the vicissitudes of life.

Her father prevails upon her to delay her marriage to Gordon Shaw, a pilot afterwards killed in the first world war. Because of this denial of herself—a perversion of her role—she attempts unsuccessfully to expiate by giving herself promiscuously to wounded soldiers after the war. A marriage deliberately planned to supply an outlet for her maternal instincts, and, perhaps, her desire to martyr herself is unsatisfactory; for Evans, she discovers, is a member of a family in which there is much insanity. In a special way the rest of her life is devoted to protecting and mothering Sam Evans, whom she must not hurt. Musing aloud:

I can't say that to him. . . . I can't . . . look at his face . . . oh, poor Sammy! . . . poor little boy! . . . poor little boy!

(Thinking strangely) *Little boy! . . . little boy! . . . one gives birth to little boys! . . . one doesn't drive them mad and kill them! . . .*

Her determination to have a son by Darrell is due to her desire to reassure Evans, who fears that he is sterile. But it is impossible for her not to love the man who fathers her child, and by the middle of the play Nina has created for herself a synthetic man who answers her needs as mother-mate.

> *Yes, you're here, Charlie*—[her father substitute] *always! And you, Sam—and Ned! . . . Sit down, all of you! Make yourselves at home! You are my three men! This is your home with me! . . . Sshh! I thought I heard the baby. You must all sit down and be very quiet. You must not wake our baby.*

and later

> *My three men! . . . I feel their desires converge in me! . . . to form one complete beautiful male desire which I absorb . . . and am whole . . . they dissolve in me, their life is my life . . . I am pregnant with the three! . . . husband! . . . lover! . . . father! . . . and the fourth man! . . . little man! . . . little Gordon! . . . he is mine too! . . . that makes it perfect! . . .*

Unfortunately this equilibrium is too precarious to last. Nina in the triumph of her completeness insists that "God is a Mother," a form of *hubris* for which there is inevitable retribution. Her synthetic man is himself made up of non-static human beings, and he disintegrates, leaving Nina a grasping, possessive mother, with the suggestion that in Madeline, her prospective daughter-in-law, she has met her match. In the end she returns to a kind of peace with Charles Marsden, her father substitute, feeling now that her account with "God the Father" is settled. Strange Interlude! "Yes, our lives are merely Strange Interludes in the electric display of God the Father," which is surely, on another level, a repetition of the chant in *Fountain* or the speeches of Cybel in *Great God Brown.*

The play, then, is one of the perversion of the ideal woman out of the pattern that O'Neill seems to have set for her. Her tragedy arises out of the very fullness of her character, because that fullness forces demands of life that circumstances make impossible of any normal fulfillment.

Two characteristics of *Mourning Becomes Electra* are so obvious that they obscure all other matters. The first is that the play is an imitation of the Greek dramatists. The other is again the Freudian machinery. It is clear that although Freudianism is the basis of the motivation of the characters from moment to moment, Lavinia primarily fits into the mystic world in which O'Neill's characters move.

The one thing which above all colors everyone in *Mourning Becomes Electra* is hate. Brooding over them is the house of Mannon, which was built as the fruit of the hatred of Abe Mannon for David Mannon. It is the house which forced Christine to hate Ezra Mannon, whom she had loved before they married and she came to live with him, and it is this house from which, for a moment, Lavinia hopes to escape at the end of the play. From the beginning Lavinia is possessed by the spirit of the house. The peculiarities that link the characters have already tied her. She loves her father possessively, resents her mother greatly, and is deeply jealous of her mother's love for Adam Brant. Lavinia is a woman of more than life size, but this characteristic fullness of demand from life that might give to her some nobility, is completely perverted by the Mannon heritage. It gives her the strength to live where every other one of the breed must die, but she lives only to suffer.

In her attitude to her brother Orin, Lavinia is very much the mother. That he too feels parallel emotions, envy of his father, envy and resentment of Adam Brant, and finally a desire to be more than just brother to Lavinia, is a necessary part of the tragedy. And that the murderous hate results in catastrophe generation after generation is at once appropriate to a play imitating the Greek trilogy, and in accord with O'Neill's view of life as consisting of cycles that recur generation after generation.

For a short moment in the last act Lavinia weakens in her grim acceptance and thinks she can escape. The house, she thinks, is more than just a symbol of the curse; it is the curse itself. She believes that she can marry Peter, but at once she realizes that there is no escape from herself. Stronger at last, she looks at the house and marches in to bear the Mannon curse: with her life of suffering to expiate it, and with her death to end it.

The tragedy consists in the waste that Lavinia most clearly represents. She had had strength, or perhaps greatness, sufficient to triumph over the other Mannons, her mother—who had in a sense become a Mannon—her father, her cousin, and her brother. Yet that strength, and the form its perversion took is susceptible to explanation, or verbalization, only if her demand as a woman from life is understood—that it offer her an outlet for the full expression of her maternal and sexual potentialities. Indeed, these potentialities are perverted into destruction, and turned in upon herself and the group tied to her by blood and family curse. And the greater the potentialities, the more impressive the tragedy.

Electra is a culmination point. Here O'Neill's creed, so laboriously developed in many ways, is taken for granted. It is necessary for an explanation of what occurs in the play, and is implicit in it, but there is none of the constant repetition by the characters themselves that is so obnoxious to some of his readers—a fact that O'Neill seems himself to have realized.

V

But what light does *The Iceman Cometh* cast upon all this? An interesting light and perhaps a brutal one. In and about Harry Hope's saloon lives a group of men who have reached the depths of degradation, spiritual and psychological. Each one is kept alive by his illusion, the illusion that he can drag himself out of his particular mire if he only wishes to do so. Each is cynically tolerant of the others' illusions, yet has a surface faith in his own.

Hickey, whom they await so eagerly, comes this time with a horrible purpose—to free this group, his periodic drinking-mates, of their illusions—for he feels the illusions only make them suffer more cruelly. He succeeds, at least for a time, in his purpose, but the results are not what he had anticipated. The illusions had kept them in a state of degraded happiness—but still, happy. They become, not content in their degeneracy, but irascible, ill-tempered. Only when Hickey himself is shown as laboring under an illusion greater than any of theirs, do they again become

happy. The play ends as they return to their state of the first act.

The play presents a double problem for an analysis of Eugene O'Neill. In it O'Neill returned to the theme of his first plays, but with a difference. For this play makes very clear the specious nature of the illusions, their total inadequacy to convince any but the holder.

At the same time Harry Hope's saloon is a perfect microcosm of the world, and what is true for the patrons of Harry Hope's saloon becomes, by implication of the drama, true for the whole world. And the play is absolute in its condemnation of the illusions of the characters. There is nothing unreasonable in a dramatist's returning to an early theme, and the changed approach is understandable enough. However, O'Neill himself had been engaged in the search for systems—illusions that would give meaning to life, and he believed, if the evidence of the plays is to be accepted, that he had found such meaning. The world could be seen in its two aspects of Being and Becoming. The eternity of Being included change, pain, suffering under the aspect of Becoming. Therefore, the world which O'Neill saw about him, and as he saw it, it was grim and brutal, had significance and value. The implications of *The Iceman Cometh,* however, are that all such illusions are spurious . . .

The cycle would appear to be complete, for O'Neill seems to say in the last play, as in the earliest, that illusions are necessary for the individual to maintain his sense of worth. In the interim O'Neill himself had searched for the symbols that give to life meaning and significance, and presumably found them. But *The Iceman Cometh* said all illusions are specious and meaningless, including this one. O'Neill had come full circle—and had, presumably, found only disillusion.

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